Outlaw, Inmate, Friar: Tales Untold

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Contents

[Introduction 4](#_Toc365371836)

[Part 1: THE OUTLAW 6](#_Toc365371837)

[The raid, July 10, 1970: Sauk Centre, Minnesota 6](#_Toc365371838)

[The messenger 35](#_Toc365371839)

[Betty and Filbert 49](#_Toc365371840)

[Last night before 58](#_Toc365371841)

[Coldwater flat 70](#_Toc365371842)

[Dreamslipping 80](#_Toc365371843)

[Part 2: THE INSIDE 89](#_Toc365371844)

[Jail 89](#_Toc365371845)

[Segregation 92](#_Toc365371846)

[Rung Stories 101](#_Toc365371847)

[Rung #1 101](#_Toc365371848)

[The Mafia and Me 101](#_Toc365371849)

[Jesus freak 104](#_Toc365371850)

[Gangs 105](#_Toc365371851)

[Russell 105](#_Toc365371852)

[Crocker 106](#_Toc365371853)

[Rung #2 109](#_Toc365371854)

[Sr. Celeste 109](#_Toc365371855)

[Slap da Bitch! 111](#_Toc365371856)

[Mafia Sal 114](#_Toc365371857)

[Max 115](#_Toc365371858)

[Rung #3 122](#_Toc365371859)

[Cigarettes 122](#_Toc365371860)

[VN rape 123](#_Toc365371861)

[First time 124](#_Toc365371862)

[Visitor’s room 124](#_Toc365371863)

[Cock mouth 126](#_Toc365371864)

[Backdoor man 127](#_Toc365371865)

[Whiteboys 127](#_Toc365371866)

[Snitch 128](#_Toc365371867)

[Freak, again 128](#_Toc365371868)

[Guardian angels 129](#_Toc365371869)

[Freak! (3) 129](#_Toc365371870)

[Vietnam baby 130](#_Toc365371871)

[Vietnam cock 131](#_Toc365371872)

[Dreamer 132](#_Toc365371873)

[Part 3: THE CONFESSIONS OF FRIAR KILLIAN 133](#_Toc365371874)

[Infidelity 135](#_Toc365371875)

[Covetousness 157](#_Toc365371876)

Introduction

I am Francis X. Kroncke. I am federal inmate 8867-147. I was once Friar Otto, O.F.M., Conv. During the Sixties’ Vietnam era, I was a Conscientious Objector, then a war resister, then a draft board raider. During an eight day trial, I was attorney *pro se* arguing a “Defense of Necessity” based upon the moral and spiritual mandates of the *Documents of Vatican II.* I was indicted on “sabotage of the national defense” and received a five year maximum sentence as one of the “Minnesota 8” in 1971. <http://www.minnesota8.net> I’ve a masters degree in theology, have been a senior manager in sales and marketing, am a Dad, now divorced for a decade, and, am fulfilling my fate as an old man with a vision, that of the “Earthfolk.” <http://www.earthfolk.net>

**Part 1: “The Outlaw”** contains shorts about how I became an outlaw told through the relationships of Jared, Char and Aaren. He’s a bit of an alter ego, but as with all fiction he is a composite character. He raids draft boards, recalls his monastic encounter with a Vietnam veteran turned monk, and struggles with developing a new sexual relationship with his former lover, Char, now a lesbian, and his new lover, Aaren, a former “Weatherman” radical, as they all try to practice “living as if I am no one’s enemy.”

**Part 2: “The Inside”** is a bit rougher material as I tell stories about the *Inside*, as cons call prison. You’ll read some easy accounts that get you from jail to prison, but then—*Beware!*—for I tell “Rung stories.” Ones that take you down three rungs deep into prison’s Shadow realm, ending up in the sector “where everything human is soon absent.” I make no apologies for describing the “absent” sector. It is simply ever a part of my daily heartbeat.

**Part 3: “The Confessions of Friar Killian”** presents the unusual approach to being a Confessor of Friar Killian who was drawn to the monastic life after pondering God’s meaning in Martin Luther’s words that in order to merit *true* salvation that one must, “Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong (**sin boldly**)...” “Talking dirty” became a mark of his Calling to be a Great Confessor. A Calling which required that he school his penitents so that they could accurately and fully describe and detail their sins, obvious and hidden. For if they did not confess all, would he not be remiss in his sacred duty of purifying them so that they could die in grace?

# Part 1: THE OUTLAW

## The raid, July 10, 1970: Sauk Centre, Minnesota

“Look, motherfucker, the days of nonviolence are over!” Aaren sticks a stone hammer in her knapsack, then bends to tape a stiletto to her left ankle. “You warmed-over hippies might still think Jericho will fall if you march and march, wagging your fannies and farting *Peace now! Peace now! Give peace a chance!*”

Her tirade doesn't anger Jared, who falls under her benediction as hippie, for Aaren has ranted like this all during the three-day retreat. It’s her show of weapons that pulls the venom from her airy ideological ranting. They make her words poison darts.

“Put that shit away!” Jared bellows as he jolts from behind the couch to confront her. “You heard what I said. Put that shit away!” as he swipes her knapsack.

Aaren, at the other end of the same motion, effortlessly snatches her stiletto with practiced hand and presses its point against Jared's heart. The artfulness of the threat scares him more than the reality of the blade poised to slice him.

“Who the fuck are you anyway?” he shouts at her. She doesn’t move. “You didn't learn that move in graduate school!”

Aaren lets the blade talk for her. She draws, uses it as a kid would a sketching pencil, slowly in one graceful movement, circling down his rib case, across his stomach, up to

his throat. It stays but an instant before returning home at her ankle.

Jared is astonished by her swift, deathly move. He’s spellbound, almost tottering in the air like a string puppet. She glares up at him. She, a mite of flesh almost obliterated by the weight of his shadow. He, a tornado of male power, sucking himself back into a vortex of straining muscle working a heart not lusting for murder.

She spits rage upwards. “I've taken three days of your pacifistic bullshit, but I'm still here. I'm still going out.” Threateningly, “Are you?”

Her body arches arrogantly. It conveys her disdain of him. It holds him at bay. She quickly turns, spurns him. It’s an authoritative shirk that says to all that her actions are not to be discussed or judged.

Jared scans the group looking for support or at least condemnation of her. No one moves.

“So it comes to this--the revelation of our thinly veiled violence. All this,” and Jared’s right arm sweeps the room, capturing all nine, freezing them with his words, halting their departure in small groups. “All you people and our talk and opening up is bullshit like she says?”

Jared notices Sean turn and continue to gather his things. But no word. *Sean?* Sean his bud, his brother in nonviolent passion and civil disobedience—*no word?*

“No word, eh, Sean?” he expels. “No word from any of you guys?”

Disgusted, Jared drops Aaren's bag, pivots and returns slowly but resolutely to finish his packing. He stuffs in his tools and casing maps. Latches and slings a backpack over his left shoulder, and not looking at anyone, avoiding all, strides towards his designated car.

Out on Highway 61 it’s all North Country Minnesota farms and picture-book animals. “C-O-W, cow. Cow is a moo-moo. G-O-A-T, goat. Goat is a nyaah, nyaah.” Jared has been doing this for about twenty minutes when Matt breaks in.

“Don't know why you're so pissed off. How Aaren felt was apparent from the start.”

“Really? I'm the only fuck-head who didn't read her right?”

“Yep.”

The simple truth stings him. *Maybe Matt’s right*. *Maybe I didn't want to face up to our real ideological differences*. Out loud: “I just thought all this Weatherman bullshit was just that, bullshit. Can she really believe all that Marxist-Maoist crap about The Vanguard?”

“Yep.”

Jared recalls a poster Aaren put up during the retreat: “Revolution grows out of the barrel of a gun!” He laughed at her when she threw it out as a challenge to the group. Jesus, how she had scourged him for that!

“After Kent State . . . after the Christmas Bombing of Cambodia . . . after the Chicago Seven trial . . . after all the black murders and the endless lies about ‘Light at the end of the tunnel’. . . you're still quoting me King and Gandhi and Jesus?!”

Man, she had really been turned on then, ad it had turned him on—to *her*, not to her insane political rhetoric. He roundly denounced her “foolish macho posturing” and ridiculed her by dramatic exaggeration. He made her position seem buffoonery as he jumped around, wildly gesticulating and blaring, “And here’s America's armed Resisters, all steamed up and stampeding towards Suicide Cliff. I ask, *How many barrels do you have, Resisters?* Oh my! Twenty-five. And, *How many barrels do you have, Uncle Sam?* Oh my! Twenty-five million!” She stormed away from that confrontation. Jared remembers it with relish. “She's a pistol . . . and I'd like her to carry my barrel!” was his wry summation to the guys after all the women left.

Jared gave her a code name, “Liquid Fire.” That's how he feels around her, as if his thighs dripped molten desire. Not that she’s a beauty queen. On the contrary she could evaporate into “average.” He, a full foot over her five-foot-five and a ton more than her hundred and twenty-two pounds. Yet she’s quick, athletic and he likes that. Likes her long raven hair and her dark black eyes. Alluring eyes that gleam when she gets worked up. Eyes that reflect a distant light, a tenebrous source.

Jared sighs as he feels Aaren’s strong, daunting, relentless energy. Not macho, as he often says as a put-down, but piercing. *God, how I'd like to wrestle with her*, is his deeply repressed desire. Free love is something that Jared's strong Catholic upbringing thwarts. Plus he wants to be faithful to Char. He fails her now and then, but readily absolves himself with a confessional “I drank too much!” or “Just a one-nighter, I mean, we were stoned!” Here with Aaren, something shudders at his core when his lips form her name.

“Aaren.” Jared shivers a bit. An ethereal voice warns, “Sleep with her and you’ll never wake up!”

*“Wake up!” Sister Johanna claps her hands just a hair’s breadth from Jared's cheeks. Up and down the line titters and giggles hide themselves in the folds of the white surplices worn by the twenty-plus pre-adolescents, all of whom see themselves warned by Her clap. She who looms as Her, the omnipresence of female power, more foreboding than their mothers could ever be, would be. “Sister,” they call her, but they all know her as the power from beyond Death.*

*Sister Johanna, the drill sergeant for Christmas midnight Mass, that gathering resplendent with all the pagan pomp of Catholicism in its Roman vestment. The Holy Mass in memory of the Father God who gave divine birth to his own Son without a Mother Goddess. The Night of the Forgetfulness of Her.*

*Ever chosen to be one of the special acolytes, robed in papal imitation, a white innocence among other black-robed acolytes, rosy-cheeked Jared carries a special torch as bodyguard to the newborn Babe. And at the crèche he’s honored to pull special time: holy hours in adoration, another privilege.*

*Yet, when Father is not looking, Sister Johanna enacts a conspiratorial role, that of spiritual terrorist. She takes Jared to the side altar, the one reserved for Mary, the “almost but not quite Divine” altar, and has him pray to Her. Yes, they are prayers that celebrate her “almost divinity,” praise her “mediating role,” address her as “co-Mediatrix of Grace.” Nevertheless, Jared learns Sister’s ardent lesson. “Pray to her, Jared. Every day. She is God’s Mother.”*

“HOOONKKK! HOOONKKK! HOOONKKK!” Matt is arm-pumping out the window at a convoy of six big semis, jacked by the sound they love to unleash, especially in wide-open cow country. It spooks the bovines, gets them running and mooing. From a distance, dogs bark. It juices the boredom of their drive. The thunderous blare also snaps Jared back to the reality of the road.

“So, OK,” he asks, stung by this new insight into Aaren, “she meant all that shit when she called me, how's it phrased—*lackey running dog of Imperialist Pigs?*”

“Yep.”

“And you knew she was packing that blade?”

“Yep.”

“Jesus, why wasn't anyone else upset?”

“Because she's a solo. None of us can control her. It's just her karma.”

*Oh, bejesus*, Jared explodes within, *Karma!* *Where the fuck’s Matt's head? This gal's going to bring down all the anti-war symbolism with her puny penis-envy dagger!*

“She's going to ruin everything. I wish you'd've told me she was straight on that stuff.”

“Look,” Matt says as he checks the rearview mirror—not that he thinks they are being followed, just that they *might*. “Look, she'll get the job done.”

Jared blurts, “But the job's to create symbols of Resistance.” He flings the words at Matt as he did towards the others during the past several days, as if no one but he understood the purpose of the mission, the message of the raids.

“Damn,” Jared catches himself, pointedly embarrassed by his preaching at Matt. “Do I have to remind *you* about this? All we need is someone writing Maoist slogans on the walls and the media will eat us alive.”

Matt doesn’t respond. *What is there to say to Jared?*

A quiet settles between them. Matt kicks on the headlights. Jared half-reclines his seat, kicks back and broods. It’s a brooding whose edge he wants to cut, for he knows that he must be disciplined tonight, focused. Eyes closed, he searches for the flame of white light within.

*“Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.” This, the priest was ever fond of quoting. It was his opening slogan for every eighth grade sex talk. Imagery he wanted to seed in their young minds. “Woman is made in the image of man. Man in the image of God. Jesus is to the Church as the husband is to the wife.” He held a priestly cache of such spiritual bullets. “Always,” and he would physically dramatize, moving his arm in jerky punctuation, “always keep women on a pedestal. Always.”*

*Youthful Jared ponders, Where else is it possible to keep them? Mary herself is on a pedestal—off on a side altar. There for all to see and adore. Truly, Jared believes: woman flesh, if not to be worshipped, is to be revered, respected, protected and, if God so calls, to be preserved. Flesh unsoiled. Unspotted.*

Matt's is also flashing on Aaren. He knows that she is a symbol. Matters have changed since Kent State. “*Extra! Extra! Four White Kids Killed by Ohio National Guard!”* Many of the Resisters are now questioning nonviolence and Aaren’s starting to snare a few ears. Diverse rhetoric has always charged the anti-war Movement at every step. It’s not surprising that Maoist rhetoric now sways the fancy of those marginally committed to nonviolence. Matt always knew that “The Movement” was fraught with hangers-on, those who were there for the electric charge of the moment, the erection of the mass rally. Still, what does it matter? *Karma.* They either suck at the teats of the Peace Movement or find themselves being sucked blood-empty by Uncle Sam's Vietnam Vampire.

Just this May, five days after Kent State and five before a like incident at Jackson State—*No Extra! Old Story: Nigger Students Bagged!”*—while at the New Mobilization's mass “March on Washington,” Matt had seen them all: pathetics and empathetics, sympathizers and activists, the weirdoes and crazies. Hundreds of thousands of protesters giving rise to a moral nerve network that Washington didn't want, and which most of the protesters were unaware they were creating. Longhairs, old hairs, old Reds, New Lefts, beads, and business suits. Each but a dash or sprinkle in the witch's pot. A pot flamed to a sizzling overflow by the chants, murmurs, prayers and sacred ejaculations of Catholics, Jews, Protestants, even Buddhists! *What group wasn't there?*

At first Matt stood back, sought a vantage point to assess whether the milling was a mob, a Movement or, what he spied for, a new Heart. At first he felt only terror. The multitude was a swill, a gulp of humanity pitching like an unsettled stomach. Indigestion of soul. Patiently, he waited for the vomit. Yet, at some unmarked moment, *It* became a *We*. Maybe it was the influence of the Marshals for Peace that Jared had joined. The four thousand or so who lined the route and kept dousing the surge with hope and vision, chanting, “Peace now! Give peace a chance!” Such were words of potency that day.

“*All we are saying is give peace a chance!*”

Matt had not been able to explain all that day meant, but he knew it had grounded him in his commitment to clandestine civil disobedience.

May 8, 9 and 10, 1970 would stand as watershed dates for Matt as they would for others in the anti-war Movement. Yet, committed as he was, a small voice lingered that shook his certainty. Once, while stoned on hashish, Matt had blurted to a room full of Movement heavies, “We're all just a bunch of young assholes, college punks, grad lab junkies.” Why his brain would not flush away that line even now he can’t figure out. *My karma?* Whatever. At this moment it draws him to look again at himself and Jared and the image of Aaren.

*Jared. What can I say about Jared?* Matt imagines him an Angry Angel. Like the one who carried out God's expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. An angel seething with holy anger, faithfully obeying his God’s command through committing an act of “holy violence.” He’s heard Jared speak about “Holy Nonviolence,” but Matt wonders, “Has he crossed the line? Like Aaren?” This question lingers briefly, quickly fades, sucked down within the flowing country night blackness that has been slowly mesmerizing Matt.

Matt’s driving on mental cruise control because he has driven Highway 61 a hundred times up to his family's summer cabin on Birch Lake. Once again he’s awash within that familiar cloak of darkness that quiets and settles the farmer, blankets him and embeds his dreams. It pacifies Matt, soothes him. Not even the snorts and teeth-grinding from slumbering Jared can ruffle his inner calm.

*“. . . for I have sinned!” Oh, shame! Oh, withering flesh!*

*“Bless me, Father!” Oh, to live without this . . . this* Thing*!*

*“You are to be pure. You have a Vocation!” But how can he now? Ever sin spotted, hands ever guilty. “Having touched . . .” Not what would later be known as pleasure, for it was only titillation, the gasp at the expanding “weenie balloon,” like the Balloon Meister at the Italian Festival, twining lengths of pencil-thin balloons into shapes, linking them, laughing at the sausage doggie. “How big’s your wiener?!”*

*Now his self-condemnation. Weeping. At his weakness of will. For without intent he has knocked Her off Her pedestal, so he confesses, for he has thought, “Janet Tremblay's soft breasts . . . ,” and his doggie went wild.*

*“Oh FATHER . . .”*

*“Bad doggie! Bad doggie!”*

As Jared wakes only the hum of the road and the hot kiss of rubber on warm cement greet him. Oddly, all else is silent. No music on. Matt’s noiseless. Clearly in deep thought. Or something.

It’s still a bit over two hours to get to their target. Matt’s never been much of a talker, Jared knows that, but he sure has the best road boat in the Resistance! Matt’s resurrected 1957 Chevy Bel-Air, with gleaming fins and all, is a true relic. Matt’s a natural talent when it comes to highway hogs, and has truly raised this clunker from the dead. Inside and out: glistening and meticulously clean. Matt's own type of shine and new. Junkyard retrofitted engine matched by down-home interior refurbishing. Paisley-robed bucket seats and beaded curtains. Fancy Hippie stuff, but not overdone; a soft sniff of incense.

Matt’s the type of guy who talks more to his machines than to people. Jared sees this trait expressed through Matt's immersion in music. *Immersion* is the correct word Jared assures

himself as he checks the stacks of tapes Matt has stashed and secreted away in “Shiree,” as he calls her. It seems like Matt always has music in the background when he doesn't have it in the

foreground. He's like an acidhead, stoned on music all the time, though Jared knows Matt is mainly a light weed man, like himself. TheGrateful Dead are his main guides. Matt’s *truckin'*—though he travels in touch with all who are sounding the magical thump and wail of the counter-culture.

As if reading his mind, just like that*—click!*—Matt starts to spin a medley of Led Zeppelin, the Moody Blues, Iron Butterfly, and a dash of the Beatles. As they get closer to their target, Jared knows Matt will switch into another cosmic channel. Minnesota's own hard-driving Bob Dylan, the sweet rousing Joan Baez, the soulful Janis Joplin, all leading up to the final sprint—wild Country Joe and the Fish, blaring Matt's draft raid anthem, “I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag.” The two will shout out. Scream it. Beat it with their fingertips on Shiree's forehead, but never, like a duet singing the “Star Spangled Banner,” belt it in key.

Come on all of you big strong men

Uncle Sam needs your help again.

He's got himself in a terrible jam

'Way down yonder in Vietnam

So put down your books and pick up a gun

We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.

And it’s one, two, three

What are we fightin' for?

Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,

Next stop is Vietnam.

And it’s five, six, seven

Open up the pearly gates,

Well, there ain't no time to wonder why,

Whoopee! we're all gonna die.

*His dad. What he always remembers is the sheer joy of walking next to his dad. Knights of Columbus parade. Holy Name march. Veterans of Wars, sacred and profane. There was the sense of doing something. Of carrying out in his own small way the War—against Whom was not necessary to know, for it was always against Evil. Satan in some guise. Even the Protestants and Jews.*

*His Dad in naval attire, a picture he long admired. A status he was eager to attain. But wherever he would go it would be where Dad said, “Go!” And from the first, it was to Him crucified. Following a pathway as uncluttered as it was cruel: “Thy will be done.”*

*“Say only that, Jared. 'Thy will be done.'”*

*To wage the battle so as to win victory, all that was required was to surrender one's will. It was this humbling act of submissive obedience that was seed to Jared’s character. Its flower was the act of offering oneself cruciform to the world, in* “imitatio Christi*.*”

Ten miles later, with Janis cranking on “Ball and Chain,” a huge grin suddenly rises on Matt's face. “Did she tell you about her fantasy?”

Without waiting for an answer, “Of course she didn't. Not to you.” This private joke keeps Matt amused for several miles.

Jared wants to ask but doesn't. He's not sure he wants to know about Aaren’s fantasy. *Must stop thinking about her.* He struggles to get back into his own space. So he chimes, “Sure, Matt, I know—it's her karma, right?”

Jared stiff-legs the seat back, reclines it as far down as it can go, and writhes for comfort. He painstakingly unfurls his six-foot-five frame, wiggling toenail to fingernail into a spot here, a twist there, capturing for bits of his two hundred forty-five pounds of lean muscle tiny niches of comfort. So laid out, he closes his eyes.

Matt mirthfully needles the slumbering giant about Aaren by inserting and raising the volume on Dylan's “You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows!”

*“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Jared's thurible bangs against the pew but grief deafens all. He aches to lift the lid and converse with the dead. “Dad . . . Dad, do you know now? Is it true? Is He the Son of God?”*

“Pit stop in 'bout two minutes,” tugs Jared back into Matt's world.

“This is taking longer than I remembered. By the time we get there the other four will have gone down.” *Look, man, paranoia doesn’t mean they ain’t following you. So you don’t drive straight, never. Take 61 to 95, hang a left, go through St. Cloud, hook-up with the 52, that way if they are following you, you’ll notice. Screwball driving, sure, but it’ll only add an hour or so, maybe less.*

“Probably.”

Jared loves Matt but his habit of tossing one-line answers never fails to irritate him.

“Okay, man, you've never really dug out your reasons for doing this. I mean, you sat in that retreat for three freaking days and you were as silent as a spy. Don't you think it’s time you at least let *me* know what's churning inside?”

“Nope.”

“Christ Almighty and bejesus! Cut me some slack, Jack. Here we’re about to commit yet another crime against Big Brother and all I really know about you is your short obituary.” Jared mimics being interviewed. “‘Yes, I risked my life with him many times. Yes, we were very close. What can I say about him? Sure, he did some Methodist seminary time, was a dedicated granola vegetarian, and a devotee of theGrateful Dead.’ *Fuck, Man*, that's not much of a base for long-term revolutionary commitment, is it?”

“Nope.”

“Is this the Theater of the Absurd or am I bundled here with a renegade sage from some hilltop?” Jared laughs at himself and his smirking partner. “Wait—then I can say, 'Yes, I knew him, he was six feet tall, not too fat, not too thin, not too religious but not too non-religious, not a Democratic but not a Republican...*C'mon!”*

*“Matt, your father's dead.” And he runs and runs, looking for him all over the world, until he comes to the bedroom. Hoisting the whiskey bottle, he gags on its bitterness. Now he understands why his Dad hid this vile liquid all around the house. He, at ten, now grasping that this bitterness kept his father alive, for it must be so—the sacred elixir which Matt reasons his Dad must have forgotten to take today and so he died. Matt squeezes his eyes tightly shut and braces his throat for the bath of fire. He gulps the fullness of his Dad's bitterness.*

“Okay,” Matt grabs the wheel with both hands, stiff-arming himself back. His words are drawn from him not by a compulsion to confess or to satisfy Jared's curiosity but by the rightness of the moment. *Karma*.

Matt speaks as if quoting himself.

“To cause the least harm.”

“That's it? Absolute passive nonresistance?”

“Can it be non-absolute?”

“But why are you a raider? Isn't that *non*-passive?”

Matt brakes and slows as he takes a full, deep breath, inhale... exhale. “Think about this: To live causing the least harm, one must be prepared to suffer the most harm.”

“Sounds like a recipe for martyrdom or suicide.” As soon as he says this, Jared regrets it. Regrets its stupidity and insensitivity. Regrets it with a flush of embarrassment because the identical sentence has been flung at him so many times when he has testified to his own way of nonviolence.

Matt smiles, sighs, murmurs a soft, “Think about it.”

“Karma, is that it?”

Matt steadies himself—they have the time, so he figures he might as well try. “Karma is a tricky concept. It’s not shallow, man. Look, we all carry things from the past and into the future. It’s what we do with them *now* that counts. How we turn them into right action, moral action. What happens to us is less important than what we *do* with what happens to us. *Get it?*”

“I thought it meant fated, like predestined or some iron law, like gravity?”

Matt’s about maxed out on words; he takes a deep breath. “No. Just that everything we do right now is *related* to what we’ve done and will do.” He chuckles. “Trying to figure what karma means might be your karma, but it ain’t mine. *Get that?*”

Jared wants to say yes but he really doesn’t get it. He’s about to press the matter, as Matt knows is his way, so, “Coffee time!” he blurts, like a ref calling “Time out!” Also with the urgency of one long overdue for a piss.

It’s 11:30 p.m. as they pull into the lot beside the *Bashful Viking Bar & Grill*. They are on the outskirts of their target, Sauk Centre, Minnesota—Sinclair Lewis’s famous “Main Street.” The symbol Jared wants: “The Draft Board on America’s Main Street.”

*“Am I a Conscientious Objector?”*

*“No.”*

*But how can it be that simple? Jared in his novice monk robes as Friar Otto pleads to the Master and the onlooker, “But . . .”*

*“No buts. Your role is to obey!”*

*Could it be simpler? “His will be done.” Wasn't this now his own father, dead, speaking through the Novice Master?*

*From within his heart, in testimony to all Fathers, he strongly voices, “Thy will be done.”*

*Auburn, Indiana, 1964. The post office. Friar Otto signs the Registration form—“Jared Jennings”—and hands it to the Selective Service clerk.*

As Matt docks Shiree, Jared forces a hard look at him. *Why have I been risking my life with a guy I don't really know? Why is he with me?*

*It's a sign of the times, these fucked-up times*, he answers himself. An answer that accounts for his many oversights as he, as all students-become-Resisters, rushed to end the war. Right now he realizes that he’s never even gotten Matt’s physical details together. White, truly white. Blond on blond. Hazel eyes. Taut body, like a seasoned tennis pro. *But I don't even know if he works out! Maybe we're together because it is “just karma,” as he says!*

Jared banishes any further musings, especially those that draw out his hunger for the past. Those not-so-distant early Sixties that were quiet days of monastic confidence when he had only to pray and fast to feel at peace with himself. He doesn’t want that hunger tonight. Yet he also doesn't want the pangs of starvation that throttles him when he thinks about now, the moment, this supposed “times they are a'changing” that charge the air of all the crazies and dopeheads and Flower Power kids who run amuck in the spirit of “these revolutionary times.”

No, he doesn't want yesterday nor tomorrow, not even now. He just wants to act, to do something! Almost the frenetic “Do it!” of that asshole Jerry Rubin. *Do it! Consecrate, immolate, expiate! DO IT!* These thoughts settle him as he sits down at the counter, cups and welcomes the warmth of the steaming java.

*Steam: the perverseness of a Minnesota bone-chilling winter day. Was it not sufficient that the Earth hardened her heart and refused to yield, had to be forced? So rudely pick-axed and back-hoed in rock screams. Bodies rest in tombs above ground in New Orleans. In Minnesota many must wait until spring’s tender thaw to inter their dead.*

*Joseph: brother. Eleven. Fourteen months older: almost twins. A memory of steam.*

*It’s the words of the priest, so silly and stupid, about “little angels” that draw steam from the ten-below air. Tears cloud all eyes and fog Jared's glasses, creating a slope of ice on his nose, consigning him to the taunts of small devils who laugh at him as his glasses keep falling off. Jared bends the sides so hard they stab his ears. He feels no pain.*

*Steam. Holy whispers. Evidence of prayers from the Communion of Saints. Even the casket exudes steam, as if Joey himself is praying, a young child’s prayers.*

*This is their beloved child who died at eight yet lived, entombed in a betraying body, for three more years. As then, now stand the inconsolable parents, brothers, sisters, all Jennings from far and wide around the cruel, cold hole. All ask, through their father’s spoken doubt: “How could God let this happen to an innocent child?” All hear, through his submission, his obedience, through his arms cast out and upward in cruciform surrender, through his uttering out loud a fiercely hissing steam of words: “Thy will be done!” Only then does the family, does Jared, hope again in their God.*

*Roses, as they are laid upon the casket, start to shrivel, curl up into dark scarlet lines and blackened clumps as the bitter, harsh, dry December cold transforms them quickly into rose crystals. Yet they die victorious as their steam rises in celebration. Jared hears, says to all, “Closely, listen closely . . . you can hear the hush of steam.” Yes, truly, a hiss, a rosy angelic ejaculation, “Thy will is done!”*

After his second cup, Matt flips into his raider mode. “Let's go over this, a final time.” He pulls out a short yellow pad with a hand-drawn diagram. “This office is a lot like the one in Hastings. It’s on the second floor and as planned we climb up here,” he pinpoints the spot with his spoon, “and then jimmy this window. As from my casing run, it's pretty well shadowed from the street. Once inside we go through this door, out into the corridor, score and torch the glass, and *bingo!* It's rock ’n’ roll time.”

Jared’s amused by how excited Matt gets about raids. *The guy makes you feel like there's no danger. He really gets off ripping off the Selective Service.*

Jared quietly chuckles. Some guys get cranked by cheating the IRS. Matt gets juiced stealing, defiling, burning, and shredding draft files. It's like watching a young priest robe for Mass during the early years when they still have fervor. They get lost in the ritual. Really meet their God in the drama of symbolic sacrifice, and crack open that special space and time called *holy*. Jared had always finagled a way to serve at their masses. Matt brings these old memories back. *In his own way, he's a priest.* Jared muses, *immolator of symbols.*

*The purest of kerchiefs laid with sepulchral touch, the priest rises, eyes searching Jared's. Eyes that stand in terror of the Devil who must have possessed him. How else this desecration? For one instant Jared misjudged and the Host fluttered to the floor. His stab to halt its flight only jostled the priest and caused two more Holy Wafers to be defiled.*

*It’s not Jared's awkwardness that irritates the priest. No, he himself has been as Jared, has done as Jared. Rather, it is the task he knows lies ahead. Canon Law is exactingly specific. The area must be scrubbed clean: scraped and scraped with the Paten so that no crumbs are left. No microscopic Real Presences. “For the host is the Real Presence, Jesus here in the bread and the wine.” Not a molecule, nary an atom is to be defiled.*

*It’s a laborious task, one that almost inevitably yields tastes of floor wax, droppings of candles, grime from leather soles. As he blesses himself, Father knows this is the Sunday morning taunt of the Vile One. Verily, he will be strong and stomach the distaste. Only a priest knows God under such foul circumstances.*

*Jared watches in rapt fascination. Awed, yet knowing that he could not, no, really does not want to spend his life in service to the Hosts. For it is not the Host that he honors by serving at Communion—rather, he’s delighted by the rare intimacies it gives him with Her. She, Mary, Mother of God, present in the guises of young women to whom he could never in any other circumstance be so close. How otherwise to inhale the perfume that Janet wears? Or spy the strap on Stephanie’s bra? Or confront the temptation of Martha’s oh so soft and inviting pink tongue!*

*“Bless me . . .”*

*“. . . are Called!”*

*Oh, Mary Mother of God, pray for me!*

As they cut their lights and slip into the alley, the emotion of Country Joe's song sobers them:

Come on Mothers throughout the land,

Pack your boys off to Vietnam.

Come on Fathers, don't hesitate

Send your sons off before it's too late

Be the first ones on your block

To have your boy come home in a box.

Its imagery makes Jared think about the others, wonder whether all has gone smoothly. Right now the tally is three raids for the good guys, zero nabs for the bad guys. No one has gotten caught. Yet he fears to admit, *Not yet, you mean!*

“It's been six months since theBeavers, did you know that?”

“Nope, haven't thought much about it.”

“Seems like six years, six eons.” No one's gotten caught. *Karma*.

What about tonight? Lots of things have changed rapidly during the last months. After the Beaver raid, that St. Paul anti-war festivity, Hoover had sent in over a hundred FBI Special Agents. Back then, Jared blustered, “Jesus, they must've been jacked. It must've blown their minds that the largest draft raid in Resistance history would happen in Farmland, USA! Jesus, what a gas, fifty-five boards and the State Director's office in one night!”

Their success swelled their bravado. “We're going to gnaw away until the tree falls! We're going to be busy beavers!” The media image took, so they used it in their post-raid PR—the “Beaver 55.’ Like other draft raid groups, they wanted a name that would irritate, annoy and miff the Feds. A name of silliness and ambiguity but a name that could instill a fear that there were many, many raiders out there, gnawing away.

Fatefully, neither satisfied nor patient enough to sit tight, wait out the Feds, Jared and a handful of Beavers plotted, upped the ante, decided to move out into the countryside. Knock off a chain of smaller draft boards, circling and creating a “Ring of Fire” around the Twin Cities.

Little did Jared and his city slicker comrades realize how different small towns would be. During their casing runs, their amateurish disguises only made them more visible to Our Town’s denizens. Old ladies watch everything, pass along rumors. “Hippies! Oh my, Millie, I saw two hippies in town today!”

Although Jared savors this Beaver 55 footnote to American anti-war history, he’s agitated by another gnawing, somewhat somber afterthought.

“Matt, how did you feel when the Kenneth Legion posted those ten-grand bounties on us?”

“Part of the risk.”

“Yeah—now's not the time to think about that.”

Once inside the board, the night proceeds routinely on this the third raid for each of them. Matt tapes the office door’s glass pane, scratches a triangle, torches and pops the glass. In a sec, they find and are ripping the files marked “1-A.” *Olly, olly, home free!*

Yet, tonight something is wrong. Jared is beset by a wave of fright. He's perspiring like a fool. Maniacally reciting “Hail Mary, full of grace” over and over in his mind. *Silent prayer.*

“Over here,” Matt whispers. He’s crowbar jacking another lock when Jared is startled by the first sound out of place. He grabs Matt's arm.

“Hear that?”

“Nope.”

Matt heaves and with one jerk snaps open the file cabinet. As practiced Jared scans the drawer, quickly picks out the 1-A files and throws them into a trash bag. They always steal some, just to fuck up the System as much as they can.

“*Thump, thump!”*

“Hear that?”

“Yep!”

Neither looks at the other. Both move towards the door. Jared drags a chair and Matt starts pushing a large desk.

“We need five minutes,” Matt says out loud, not whispering anymore. “Just five minutes.”

They blockade the door and swiftly return to the file cabinet.

“Plan B! Plan B!” Matt blurts, saying it over and over with escalating excitement. “Plan B! Plan B!” as he throws a bunch of files into a heap.

Jared douses them with charcoal fluid.

“*Open the door! FBI!*”

“Shit, fire them up! Burn the suckers!” Matt howls.

“*FBI!*” once again. Then the blockade starts to heave and split like a ship battered by high seas. The files flare up quicker than Aaren's temper but just as fast smolder into a thickening cloud of smoke.

“Jesus, where can we go?”

“Over here, in the corner.”

Both cough, move towards an open window.

What they had not planned for was Plan B. Plan B was always a joke. “And if you get caught, burn the suckers! At least go down in a blaze of glory.”   
 “Blaze of glory” was a humorous password among them. Now it rouses terror.

*“Put out your hands!” Like a turtle asked to stick out its neck. “Show me your palms!” Ah, will the sting ever be forgotten? The memory of the ruler: palms, not knuckles. Sister Johanna loved palms. It was the Brothers who later lashed the knuckles. But she, Dreadful She, diligently watched, looking for signs of weakness.*

*She did not have to say it, he knew. “Don't cry!”*

*It was a hope, a prayer, a plea, “Don't cry!”*

“Saved by the FBI! How humiliating,” Jared mocks himself as he’s pulled and pushed out of the choking smoke. It’s a scene he will long remember. They had smashed in what remained of the door, stuck their guns through the smoke, all the time yelling, commanding, threatening. “FBI! You're under arrest. *Don’t move or we’ll kill you!*”

*Kill me, shit, I'm suffocating to death and I'm supposed to be worried about him killing me?*

Later on, that memory never fails to get a laugh. But this night it doesn't.

Jared at first was sure that it wasn’t really the FBI but locals. Mad-ass VFWers or some redneck bunch itching to kick their radical asses all over town. But *Sweet Jesus, it is the FBI!*

“Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

Jared's relief is short-lived. A gloved fist whacks him across the chin, implanting a spike of pain he’s never felt before. *Where's Matt? Is he okay?* flicks through his mind. He’s answered by a jabbing stick, poking and snagging his belly flesh, sticking him with needles of hurt that throw him into spasms. He would have retched but nothing functions as his every sense scrambles for shelter from the attack. *It's not the FBI! Holy Jesus!* A final flurry of punches sends him reeling to the floor.

Before Jared can get up, a heavy book, thick and droopy—later jailhouse chatter names it the phone book trick! “Leaves no bruises, see, it’s magic!”—is slammed on top of his head and someone begins beating on it with a club. Heavily hard, heaving breaths hard, pounding a dull popping beat into his head. “*God!* What an unforgiving headache,” is how he’ll retell it later.

Thoughts of Matt have disappeared, replaced by a set of images that Jared has never let out, only now paroled from his nightmares.

“*Don’t move or I’ll break your arm!” Jared stirs under the blanket of sticks and wads of newspapers as bully-boy Quinn strikes, then blows out the match. “I warned you!” Quinn hefts him up, a seven-year-old skinny as a twig, and yanks his left arm behind his back up to his ears,* Crack! Crack!

*“What did you do to get him so angry?”*

*What did I do? Dad . . . what did I do?*

*Why doesn’t anyone believe me?* The beating drives Jared back so deeply into a repressed area of his psyche that it releases a fury and a savagery that threatens his own sense of himself. He—the preacher of nonviolence, the trainer in nonviolent tactics, the spiritual witness to the nonviolent Jesus—explodes and attacks with the savage violence unleashed by Quinn.

In a blink—he could never recall how it happened—Jared ejects himself up from the floor, throws out his arms as if scattering tall brush and swatting down a pathway, slaps his face to focus his eyes, and lunges towards the nearest human form.

For what seems longer than a chase dream, he holds on to this form, a form he does not take in as to size or weight or even gender. Off balance, he flings himself so bundled against the wall, bouncing back to the other side, holding on as if to a treasured packet, banging and banging, thumping and thumping till a chilled dark wind settles him down in a frontier town of the dreamless unconscious.

*She smiles as they walk up. Monsignor Boyle says, “He’ll make a good priest.” She smiles but it’s just to artfully cover the lie. Gracefully—her bitterness deeply hidden—she untethers the boy from herself. His tender hand she places in the hand of this ancient one, but his heart, never! This is not the first time nor will it be the last that he—*Reverend Father!*—will steal her treasures. But she knows how to survive. Her heart holds firmly on to the crucifix on her rosary as she prays “Holy Mary Mother of God!”to carry off this ordeal. The throb in her throat is but a repressed outlet for the grief she’s feeling at this theft from her loins. Her own mother had told her, “Marie, keep your eyes on the crucifix. It’s the only way!”Jared enters the “minor seminary” at thirteen years of age.*

“Good evening, Mr. Jennings.”

The phrase, the salutation floats from somewhere and settles on the tip of his nose. “Good evening,” as he tries to focus on the shadow, “. . . Mr. Jennings.” He’s coming to, hearing other noises, voices.

“Good evening, Mr. Puglasi.”

“Matt—Matt, is that you?” Jared feels himself shout, but not so that others can hear.

*Mr. Jennings . . . Mr. Jennings . . . Mr. Jennings . . . .* the call for his name, as in the early days of the seminary, before he became Friar Otto. As regained in those days of college where

it was a sign of his forthcoming adulthood. His name—but who knows his name but Matt?

Four men are standing above him. He’s sitting on the hallway floor outside the draft office. No smoke, only odor. His body is so sore that he does not feel pain at all.

“Who are you?” he asks, his voice like that of a lost child.

“Mr. Jennings,” a fatherly voice begins to lift Jared, “I’m Agent Brennan, FBI.”

Agent Brennan, as he helps Jared stand up, begins adjusting his clothes, tugging his shirt, smoothing out his slacks. Jared is really confused. *How did they know? Who told them?* He doesn't want the word to live but it jumps up bawling, *Betrayed! Betrayed! You’ve been betrayed!*

He can't see Matt. *Where have they taken him? Who does he suspect? No, no, she wouldn't—Aaren? Why had she gone solo? What had she meant, “What this Movement needs is more blood!” Could she?* His thoughts are shattered as suddenly Matt's body is thrown up against his. *Where’d he come from?* *How…?* Later he’d hear*, “*FBI magic, voodoo, man, these guys are spooky!”

*He touches her body. Softness, her smile. So inexperienced in images and words, her breasts defy his tongue but he adores, whispers, “Sweet breezes.” His soul licks hers. These, his thoughts the moment before the screen is pulled and he’s paralyzed. Netted in Confessional darkness.*

Before he can muster, “Matt!” Before he can express his concern about the welt on Matt's cheek both are shoved, pushed with those tiny thrusts whose meager energy builds like the first grains of a sand slide from infinitesimal to infinite initiating Matt and Jared's slog down a creaking flight of wooden stairs to the street and towards a harsh reality.

The Little Hoovers handle them according to their orderly ways. Speedily, each is spread across the trunk of an unmarked car, patted down, and handcuffed.

Off to the side an ambulance idles, lights flashing. *What happened?* Splayed on the trunk, Jared strains to see but can’t. “You son-of-a-bitch!” is heard as a hand grabs his hair and yanks his head back. A knee pounds an ungodly pain up into his butt, the blow placed expertly with full force on his anal sphincter. His head is thrown back down against the car’s rear window, a head *thud!* almost driving him back into unconsciousness. Word fly that he does not hear, “Stop!” “Jack, don’t!” “Get that motherfucking fag pinko bastard, good!” Actions happen that he does not see: Agent Brennan walks up and stops the pummeling. Only later will he learn, at trial, that he had broken this agent’s arm, that he was “the nearest human form” Jared bounced around the hallway.

Jared and Matt are spooked, scared, subdued, exhausted. They are not left alone for a second. Someone is watching them or someone is questioning them; relentlessly.

“Where are the other guys?” one agent keeps asking. He asks it about every other minute. He appears to be in charge.

“You guys are in deep shit, so you better cooperate,” he cajoles. Silence.

*What’s Matt thinking? Is he listing names?*

As if hearing his question, Matt, in the one moment they are left alone, smiles and says, “Karma.”

“Karma?” Jared snickers. A slow rumble of chuckling gathers and builds, then erupts. He’s roaring louder than he wants to, pain and ache and unplumbed tension fleeing on his sound. His attempt at self-control breaks down into a series of muffled snorts.

At the first sound, the head Agent practically leaps on them. “Quiet! You jerks think this is funny? You'll see how funny prison is! Separate these two.”

Jared can’t regain his composure and when pushed into the FBI's back seat he writhes with the unseemly stabbing numbness of excessive giggling.

*“Arise, Friar Otto!” In his father's eyes it can be seen: “Thy will be done.” Here, as for centuries, a son reborn as Son. In the denial of Her birthright name he now comes: Franciscan*

*Investiture, 1962. His father's middle name, “Otto.”*

On the ride back to Minneapolis’s Hennepin County Jail, and as Agent Brennan barks, “Take these jerks to the Hole!” a tape loops endlessly through Jared's mind: *I am alive. I am alive. Leave your name and phone number and I will get back to you as soon as possible. I am alive. I am alive.* This plays and replays all during his short clips of conversations with the Feds.

“We got you guys cold. You're not as smart as you think.”

“Don't you guys got anything better to do than beat up on nonviolent protesters?”

“Nonviolent! You call this raid nonviolence?”

“What do you guys think about the war?”

“I think it's great!”

“Are there any priests in your group?”

And so it goes, jabs of conversation, leading to no knockouts.

Jared lets the film reel roll. Acts his part. In the sole moment when he finds himself questioning the night, *Did the FBI beat on us?* he stomps on the urge. He doesn't want to analyze the evening. Doesn't want answers to that question. So he rewinds the reel and plays it again.

He imagines Matt *Giving them his famous one-liners. That'll drive them nuts!* Then he remembers all the other guys. *Were we all betrayed?*

He feels Aaren and her stiletto: agitation. *If she’s not Judas* . . . Would she really use that piddling dagger? If she has, did they shoot her? *Would they shoot a woman?*

*As she reaches towards her ankle, a savvy agent cocks his gun and point-blank aims it at her. Jared lunges, throwing his body across hers. The bullet couples them. He’s fatally wounded. She lives.*

*She gazes upon him: he’s John Wayne. He looks at her: she’s Maureen O'Hara.*

*“Liquid Fire!” he gasps as he touches her tears. “Liquid Fire, I love you.”*

*Screen dissolves.*

“Bejesus, how stupid!” Jared snorts. To others, a comment without an apparent cause.

“Yes? Do you have something to say?” encourages Agent Brennan.

Jared doesn’t hear him. He's recasting the fantasy, realizing how enraged Aaren would be by such a scenario. *If she got shot* . . . Man, what would she think? What was her fantasy?

So taken by this fancy is he that Jared misses what distinguishes this night from any he’s ever had or will have. He wants a Revolution and now he’s got one. But it’s certainly not his hoped for “Peace now!” world. No, hardly—rather, his life is about to start anew and no one's singing “Happy Birthday.”

## The messenger

Jared’s Catholic world: It runs like a nightly revue through his dreams. All he ever wanted was to be a priest. Or at least that’s what the family expected. Life was simple: “God calls, you answer!” His was a world of obedience: a commandment to obey parents and the absolute duty to obey God. But how does one hear the call? Jared wasn’t sure.

Things in his life went quite automatically for years—the years of obedience to his father. He obeyed by enrolling in the minor seminary. It wasn’t that his father said, “Go there!” No, everyone simply assumed he would. He was the last of seven children and none of his siblings had entered the religious life. This was almost a family sin of disobedience in the Irish Catholic world. Someone—at least one child—had to give his life to God on behalf of all others. That was the family obligation and Jared’s fate.

So his spent his high school years at Mount St. Francis Seminary. He was a holy boy and a holy jock, ripping up the hardwoods and having to struggle with the sin of pride as he heard, “You’re really great! God, what a gift to give up. You could be a star in college ball!” Coaches from other teams asked him, “What college are you going to?” Tempted him with the capital sin of pride. No, he obeyed, and the next step was the novitiate in Chaska, a year secluded from “the world,” one of intense spiritual formation and study. But like most young seminarians, Jared struggled with the call—intellectual doubts spiked with hormonal cravings. Had he heard correctly? Was this really what God wanted him to do—be celibate? Then, one day, a messenger arrived.

Friar Albert is a “late vocation,” one of those who enters the monastery after some life-altering event, usually a tragedy. Otto knows a bit about the Vietnam War because his brother Thomas, five years older, has been over there for several years, but then not too much because he and Thomas were never close. Now three veterans have entered the novitiate right after they returned home from the battlefield. They don’t talk much about the war and they’re a bit cliquish given that they’re older. Most novices are in their late teens like Otto, just graduated from high school in the minor seminary system. He’s seen these vets together now and then, sharing smokes and the kind of laughter that comes from sharing an inside joke.

Otto’s seen Albert mostly in his self-appointed role as monastic photographer. However, he’s had no more than cursory exchanges with him. At times he’s overheard bits of conversations but nothing of note. Of all the novices, Otto knows Albert the least. So the note slipped under his door was more than a surprise—“You got to talk with me.” Its straightforward urgency was perplexing.

“C’mon in! Don’t gawk like a tourist!”

As Otto has noted before, Friar Albert seems to always have a camera, the mechanical eye, draped around some part of his body. Even while chanting the Divine Office, Otto knows that it’s hidden in a fold of his robes. He has fantasized that Albert pulls it out and snaps a quick one of the *Real Presence!*

Albert motions him into the dimly lit room, remaining half stooped over a light-box which is a slide viewer and the sole source of light. It takes a half-minute or so for Otto’s eyes to fully adjust to the twilight atmosphere. Even in this shadowy world what he can make out is certainly more than what he finds in other monks’ rooms. This one has the feel of an inner sanctum. He squints and sees fuzzy outlines of posters, photos, and film strips taped or tacked to the walls. It’s certainly more a workshop than a room for prayer and meditation. More striking—and in stark contrast to the bareness of his own room—is a huge basket of freshly cut flowers. Carnations and roses—*curiously, all pink!*

Albert head-beckons him to step closer. Otto moves like a moth to flame.

“You should leave this place!”

Otto hears the sentence but not its meaning as it slips, slightly muffled upward from Albert’s face-down lips. He’s intently looking at one slide, pushing it this way and that.

“You should leave this place,” he repeats.

“What?”

Still not looking at him, “You should leave this place.”

Albert suddenly straightens up, almost knocking Otto backwards, walks past him and flips on the central light. As the harsh illumination unmasks their surroundings, Otto jerks a step further back in shock—from all sides it feels like he’s being attacked!

*Albert’s world*: “Attack of the eyes!” Eyes from an army of war photos. Splattered all over one whole wall. Hungry eyes, but not for food. Laughing eyes, but not for jokes. Longing eyes, but not wishing that you were there. Faces of American soldiers dressed and armed to the teeth. Faces of yellow people in black pajamas and sandals walking beside oxen. Otto recognizes from TV that these are Vietnamese farmers. Albert is clearly obsessed with faces and eyes.

*What?* Otto begins to feel the creeps—someone is looking at him, spying, sneaking up behind him—he turns and locks in on a set of eyes peering out from a gigantic mushroom cloud that rises to form a skull whose eyes, once the illusion is grasped, are the Earth and the Moon. He voices a soft, startled, “Jesus, Mary, Mother of God, protect me!” as he blesses himself.

More horror: Another enlarged photo shows a monk—Otto presumes he’s Buddhist—sitting meditatively before a huge Gothic crucifix that holds Christ’s body, broken and torn, with gouged flesh, blood streaming in every obscene direction and—horror of horrors!—Christ is headless!

“Oh sweet merciful Jesus!” Out loud, blesses himself, again. Otto is transfixed, immobilized.

Unnoticed, Albert has begun his ritual chain smoking and the wispy trails float, surrounding and irritating Otto. This nastiness makes him acutely aware of Albert and he once again hears his odd directive, “You should leave this place.”

“What?”

“Listen, I’ve been watching you and it’s clear, *crystal clear*, you gotta take a hike over the hill.”

Albert doesn’t wait for Otto’s response. He’s shuffling pictures, moving slides on and off the viewer, pausing now and then to draw Otto’s attention to a specific image like a docent on a museum tour. Then he steps over, turns off the lights again, steps back, and like magic—without Otto’s hearing the click—images appear against another wall, tall, wide, sharply focused, almost life like.

“See that?”

Otto looks at the projected image and as Albert brings it into focus a young, scraggily bearded face appears. It’s a soldier with an index card taped on his helmet, stating “War is Peace!” Otto laughs.

Albert grumbles, “Funny? Jesus, Otto, you’re—” but it gets suffocated by two quick hits and a deep exhale.

“Sorry. I mean, look he must be kidding? I mean, you know, he’s killing people every day and he’s certainly not enjoying the Peace!”

“Asshole!” Not noticing Otto’s shock at the profanity, he urges, “Look closer, man. Whaddya see?”

As Otto steps nearer the projection, Albert blurts out, “It’s me, man, it’s me.” Almost a whimper, “It’s me, sucker. Look at that idiot. He believes he’s waging peace. Look at him. *Look into his eyes!*” The eyes do fascinate and Otto is moved. He’s about to say something when Albert presses forward, “Do you know what I did?”

Before Albert answers his own question, he spins around and slaps and tapes another enlarged photo on the lighted wall.

“*Thoc!* You got to understand Thoc.”

Then Albert starts talking like a man with caffeine jitters, quickly, darting, frenetically, at times stuttering. “I was an assassin. On a team of assassins. But, but . . . no one will admit that, not—” He turns to check Otto’s comprehension.

“You don’t believe me, that in war there are assassins?” More smoke flares forth, “Jesus, are—are you—? You *are* a moral virgin!”

Albert slowly backs away and moves from the photo to the slide-board, picks two, three, slips them into the carousel, then in a rising panic—something he deals with daily—he starts rapidly projecting slides and as rapidly speaks to their illuminated faces on the wall. His frenzied passion conquers his stuttering.

“*Napalm!* Burns the skin and eats flesh like dragon breath. *Anti-personnel bombs!* Turns people—shit, even kids and old ladies into Swiss cheese. *Booby traps!* That guy lost his leg. He was lucky. See that! *A kid*, just a baby, dropped a grenade into that bar room.”

Then up comes the face. Suddenly, Albert is stone-cold quiet. He appears caught, as if just nabbed by the cops. It takes a minute, then Otto cracks the silence. “Thoc?”

Albert coughs, takes out a new pack of cigarettes, slowly tears the wrapping, then lights one up and speaks through a cloud of smoke, “Right, Thoc.” The words drag out from Albert’s mouth. “He was one of my kills.”

“What?!”

Albert pulls up a chair, sits, nasty laugh. “Or the one who killed me . . .” Quiet suffocates the room.

*Motherfucker!*

Stillness. Faces. Eyes. Thoc. Otto is bewildered. “Why am I here?”

Albert crushes his barely smoked fag and stands up, getting back to his mission. “Why *did* you come to this place? Afraid of your d-d-dick? Or being eaten by some broad’s p-p-pussy?”

*What?!*

Thomas had always taunted him, called him a pussy every time he whipped his ass shooting lights out at “horse.” Big brother-little brother horseplay but it was more than that. Thomas didn’t like his little brother. Coming to the seminary was Jared’s not so sub-conscious way of one-upping the war hero. Unknowingly tapping into all this, Albert’s remark roundly pisses him off. An ugliness crawls up and all around Otto’s face: eyes that pierce his “big brother” Albert with little brother spite, lips that curl ready to spit, cheeks that harden, struggling to control a tongue that will only lash back with words that will evoke further punishment. Raging within, Otto pivots towards the door. Albert lurches and throws a forearm around Otto’s throat, almost locking him in a half-nelson, only the bulky robes foil the move. Otto instinctively twists around and, face to face, slips his arms under Albert’s armpits and lifts up the slightly shorter monk—athletic fingers pressing on cheekbones, ready to crush. Thomas was stunned the day Jared did that—the distance between them widened into a chasm. Here, the intimacy of the embrace, its virile heat, is something the Novice Master might interpret as too erotic for brotherly love. Both men freeze at the edge of a violence neither seeks.

Albert breaks the tension, snipes: “No doubt, Otto, you *do* need a good hot fuck, that’s for sure.”

Otto recoils. The statement frightens him. It’s not Ablert’s foul language that startles him, rather he hears them echo his gravest self- doubt. *True?* He lifts Albert higher, and in one powerful stroke, slams his friarly feet onto the ground, as if trying to stake him there, then shoves him backwards. Albert stumbles, staggers, and falls flat on his holy ass. He sits stunned for a moment, then laughs, rolls over and gets up off the floor. He whips out his pack and within a breath has a cig on his lips, lights it. To Otto he looks like a devil, horns rising amidst clouds of billowing smoke.

Otto struggles with whether to flee or fight. Words pour out—he’s cross-examining Albert. “What are you doing? Why are you here?”

Albert rips Thoc’s photo off the wall and holds it like a piece of evidence being shown to the jurors. His voice is from a morgue. “Thoc.” Tapping the wall, “I told you. *My* kill, damn, or he killed himself first. Immolation. Doused himself in gasoline and went up. *Poof!* Like a Roman candle.”

Otto’s compassion distracts him, “God, how sad. Was he crazy?”

“Crazy?! Jesus, Otto, he was holy . . . holy . . . *holy*, not crazy. Only me, *I* was crazy!”

Abruptly, with ambush startle, Albert is back at Otto. “How the fuck can you, in here? Look, you g-gotta get out of here. In here you, *they*—you know!—they’ll lead you into false worship. You’ll end up being a priest, not a saint. That’s what you want, r-right, to be a saint?”

Otto is totally flustered, tongue-tied. Albert shakes his head, both disapproving and disappointed. He puts down his smoke, steadies himself, smoothes out his robes. Turns towards Otto. Coughs. Kneels, assumes a confessional posture.

“Listen. Look at Thoc. He was the leader of the Buddhist nonviolent resistance. His followers caused no end of problems for us and the South Vietnamese government.” He pauses. The next words come out sounding false, and it’s clear that Albert knows he never believed it. “He was the enemy. Worse than the Viet Cong. *I had no choice*.”

Albert takes out his rosary beads, closes his eyes and raises his arms to heaven. Otto watches his lips move in silent prayer. *Forgiveness? Mercy?* Otto is at a loss as to what to do next.

Abruptly, Albert rises. His voice is steady, soft. “I spent six months undercover as his disciple. I sat in lotus meditation till I thought my d-dick would fall out my a-asshole. I suffered all the time because I was a good soldier. I was waiting to find the right time to k-kill him. And ya know what happened?” He lights up yet another cigarette. Puffs, long drags. Crushes it, half smoked. The mound of the nicotine dead in the ashtray grows.

“Sh-shit, one night he calls me in and tells me,” he blesses himself, “Jesus, tells me what I was about. *He knew.* G-goddamn it, he knew!” New smoke. “Instead of cursing me, instead of calling in some thugs to do me in, he blesses me! He tells me—Jesus, oh, Jesus, can you believe it!—he picks up *our* Bible and reads from Daniel, a passage: ‘I will kill this dragon without sword or club.’ Then he says, ‘This is written for you. You are the messenger of he who kills without sword or club.’”

Otto doesn’t have to ask. Clearly this is why Albert is here, searching for Thoc’s meaning. But what does it mean, “without sword or club”? Otto wants to ask but Albert doesn’t stop to talk about himself. He steps over and clicks another slide. It’s Albert in saffron robes, nestling a charred body in his arms. It’s a *Pieta*-like shot. Albert speaks but not to Otto. It’s as if he’s asking the question of himself, “Do you know what he’s saying to me?” Answering, “He said, *The children*.”

“What?”

“The children. He was always talking about “the children.” How God doesn’t want us to kill the children.”

The messenger —*Thoc!*— is now speaking to Otto; he hears him. *How could Albert have known?*

*The Novice Master asks, “Tell me about your family.” Joey. Young boy, just two years older. My brother, Joey, frothing at the mouth, me, standing, yelling, “Mom, Dad, something’s wrong with Joey!”*

*“Encephalitis, Mrs. Jennings.” The doctor turns to Dad as if the medical explanation is too burdensome for her. “The disease comes from Africa. It’s spread by mosquitoes and when it bites the young it’s almost always fatal.” Then the death sentence: “They rarely make it through puberty.”*

*“May he rest in peace,” the Master blesses himself.*

*Nothing more need be said. Both know how the wheel of spiritual justice turns. Jared is called to give up his life to give fuller meaning for a life given up.*

“But he killed himself. Suicide. He’ll go to hell! *Forever*!”

Albert is weeping. His tears harden back into fierce eyes. “Hell?” His left arm sweeps the area forcefully. “We’re in hell, *now*! This place is hell as long as we k-kill for our God. Listen, Otto, Thoc *did not* die in my arms. No, a thousand times no. He was reborn. *I* died in *his* arms. He slew me with his love—love for the children I was killing. All of us, children of the One God.”

Both men stand, stare at one another, perplexed. Albert: “All I know is this, Otto. I’ve seen terrible things. I’ve looked into the eyes of men who’ve done terrible things. I’ve done terrible things. I’m not forgiving myself, but God does work in mysterious ways. Thoc spoke to me so I could speak to you. Hear me?”

It’s over. Whatever was meant to be said has been said. Albert has spoken what Thoc revealed. Albert knows that it was a message for Otto, knew the first time he looked the kid in the eyes—saw Thoc’s eyes. It’s the reason he’s avoided getting to know him. He’s put off this day as long as possible. Not because he feared for Otto but because he feared for himself. Once Thoc speaks to Otto through him—once the message is delivered—then Albert has to get about his own work. He’s come here to look at the eyes of his fellow friars to see if he could find God’s eyes. Somehow he knows that living here is part of his own journey, a battlefield where he has to learn how to kill the dragon without sword or club.

*What more is there to do?*

Exhausted, as if saying farewell, he whispers, “You’ve got to leave.”

“You stay and I leave?” More incredulous than asking for clarity.

Albert nods, head bent in resignation.

*I came here because of Joey.* He doesn’t want to share this with Albert, but he hears himself speaking before he can censor himself, “I came here because of Joey. He was just a kid. I was just a kid. Why did God let that happen?” Otto hears the echo of his father’s graveside despair.

Albert: “I don’t know. I really just don’t know.”

Otto: “That’s why I’m here. Like Thoc said, for the children. To bless the children. Baptize them. Teach them the ways of the Lord.”

Albert takes out another cigarette and lights it as Otto steps away, turns, leaves, fingering his rosary as he walks back towards his room.

Walking alone, no one else in sight, Otto speaks to God, his dad and himself: “I’m to leave?” Pauses. Shakes his head, “I don’t think so.”

Spiritual justice: His meeting with Albert gives him no rest. Like all novices, Friar Otto has had doubts about his worthiness to become a monk. Such doubts plague all souls who seek spiritual treasure. The Novice Master counseled, “If you don’t have doubts, then most certainly come talk with me!” But what Albert has raised in Otto’s mind goes beyond doubt. He has delivered a message, possibly from God the Father through this holy monk Thoc. It didn’t really matter how he heard—*God does work in mysterious ways!*

Day after day, Otto is convinced, then not. *Is Albert a nutcase? Working out his guilt through me? Maybe. But I came here to hear God’s call. Is he calling from Vietnam? Is this why Thomas is there and I’m here?* He prays. Spends excessively long stints kneeling in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Late nights and early mornings in deep meditation on the sufferings of Jesus hanging from the cross. *Was I to leave the world? Or live in the world? Joey! Joey! I love you. Help me. Help me now. I need you, my brother!*

As is Otto’s way—as it has been for Jared—he often gains spiritual insight while shooting hoops. Such a day comes: The sun is just rising. He’s on the basketball court, ball in hand. The front of his shirt says, “Knights of Columbus, CYA” and the back, “St. George’s Dragon Slayers” with the number 7. At court’s edge he does some preliminary stretches. Then he starts a routine: lay-ups, jump shots and hooks. His athletic ability is apparent. He stops at the top of the circle, pauses to look at the rising sun.

Suddenly, with a lurch, he escalates the intensity. Rains shots through the basket like a pro: twenty-footers, top-of-the-key hook shots, left hand, right hand. He is a man possessed. Huffing, puffing, up and down the court, shot, rebound, again, again, faster, harder, *push it, push it* until at last he collapses, exhausted, face down on the grass.

*I hear!* Chest and shoulders heaving, he grips the grass, pulling up soil. With a clod of the fertile earth in each fist he rolls on his back and crumbles them onto his face and shirt. *I die with you O Lord!* He smears himself with the dirt, smears it all across his chest. Lies there a long moment. Shouts, “I rise with you O Lord!” Stands, takes the roundball, palms it, lifts it as high as his reach allows and then slams it down as if planting it in the ground. He looks at the hoop, raises his arms to the sun, implores the heavens, shouting, screaming, screeching: “I hear and I obey.” Over and again: Accepting, rejoicing, a bit manic and at last, upon his knees, eyes towards heaven, “I hear and I obey.”

All said, he turns and walks, without the ball, back to the monastery.

The Novice Master stands gazing out the window behind his desk. His thoughts are far off, grappling with the action this young novice has just taken. Friar Otto stands in full monastic garb, halfway across the room. It is noon. The sun is halfway up the window.

“Are you *sure*?”

With a sigh of empty resignation, “I’m sure, Reverend Father.”

The Novice Master knows it is futile to try and convince young men to live the celibate life, knows that it has to be a gift from God. So, although shocked that this is coming from Jared, whose family he knows so well, he knows his task. He must make certain that this young soul is sincere—he must put him to the final test. Turning towards Otto, the Master upbraids him, “I am disappointed!”

Otto holds his ground, says, “I have prayed, I have searched my soul, I—”

“What foul thoughts have led you astray?”

Otto spurts out defensively, “The children!”

The Master is caught short—he has no idea what “The children!” means.

“What? *What* did you say?” The Master advances. Their faces almost touch.

“The children, Master. I must serve the children.” But it comes across as a weak and lame excuse, sounds like whimpering, even to himself. Otto wishes that Friar Albert would come in and explain it all.

“You are denying God’s call because of children?” The Master can only assess that this is a most clever way to cloak his real desire. “Children?” An embarrassed silence floats between them, “You mean you want to have sex with a woman. That’s it, isn’t it?”

Not knowing what to do next, feeling totally bewildered even by his own statements, swamped by a rush of doubts as to whether he’s truly grasped what Albert meant, uncertain as to what is really driving him to this act of madness, the young Friar reaches back and speaks in the language he knows the Master will understand, possibly accept.

His head jerks slightly backward, lips trembling and hands shaking. “I am unworthy of God’s call.” Hurriedly, “I, I am impure in thought and heart . . . I am weak in will!”

This confession draws forth the Master’s compassion. “Yes, truly, a monk’s life is a hard life.”

The Master pauses. Beyond his own disappointment, he’s concerned for Jared’s father, knowing how much he wants this, his youngest, to become a priest. Still, a priestly vocation has to come from within. No sense shaming the boy for what he doesn’t have.

“It is good that you’ve listened to hear God’s Call. It is good that you tried. Now,” sighful resignation, “go back to your loving mother and father, your family—give my love and blessing to all the Jennings. You are a good boy, Otto—” he pauses, renames him. “You’ll make a good husband, Jared.”

With a blessing and a fond touch on the cheek, the Master—accepting as God wants him to do at these sad moments—dismisses him, “Go. Do God’s work in the world.”

Jared quickly returns to his room, disrobes Friar Otto for the last time, packs his belongings and heads for the monastery garage where he knows a ride is already waiting to take him to the train station. Fittingly, it is the feast day of his Order’s founder, St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1964.

Friar Albert watches from the chapel window. He’s trembling and crying, feeling abandoned and gripped by the self-hatred that visits him every time after a kill. He tracks Jared’s progress towards the waiting car, suitcase in hand, walking slowly, climbing in—*Otto, one of my kills!*

Albert wants to die right there, but then—*poof!*—the image of Jared lights up like a Roman candle. His heart feels suddenly, strangely lighter.

*Thoc is no longer here!*

## Betty and Filbert

It was a simple matter. All the fellow did was walk over, tell me he likes my cock and ask me to visit his bunk after Lights Out. *How many times have I asked myself the question?* Questioning the question. Asking whether my time will come. Whether it’s just my fears or my personal distaste? Is it something out of the long forgotten past of my cerebral cells? Is it a cultural inhibition? Something carried around in my mental chest, my emotive Pandora’s Box? *What indeed is it? What accounts for it?*

All I remember is my spurting hostility. Except for the guy’s cool manner I expected to see my fist in his teeth. There he was in the stall. Penis hanging, ivory white thighs relaxed and enticing. *Aw, shit*, I’d often felt strange inklings when in jock rooms. *How many times did I feel the heat—the bitch’s heat—of a basketball locker room after a game?*

After you’ve spent the evening hustling and working and straining with other bodies to achieve a goal, how many times then do you feel the lure of their exhausted thighs? Flit on images of embracing them? Or even hold their pride in your hand, stroking it?

Back then it all seemed so impossible. No—strangely, it seemed even more possible. After all, you had disciplined yourself to be One Body. To function as one hand, one eye, one reflex for so many months that the victory rightly drew forth the embraces of triumph. How we all kibitzed about screwing some of the cheerleaders or some other lucky filly. *Fucking-A*, how many of us knew the stalking terror of desire for each other? Sure, it was more possible back then. But here?

Okay, sure prison makes you horny. I mean, there are no females around. But it also lacks the lust of teamwork. Isn’t that obvious? I mean, man, in prison each con pulls his own time, no matter what he thinks. When you get up each day, you desire to be free. Certainly you don’t desire that others be free first. *Dig it!* You might say that or hear someone say it but everyone knows that’s a crock of shit. In prison it’s clear and simple—Each guy wants out first.

There’s no shame attached to that. After all, when they hang you by the balls you certainly can’t free anyone else till you’re free yourself. *Damn right!* I certainly want to get out. I’m glad when others get out, but I always want myself to be next in line.

*Hear me!* Doing time all alone leaves me ice cold, sexually. I mean, when I beat off at night it’s an event full of personal longings. Longings to be back with the women I knew. Masturbation doesn’t lend itself to teamwork. Although we do play a lot of basketball in prison. Yeah, man, but it’s a different thing. *Listen up!* When this dude walks up to me and tells me in no uncertain terms that he wants to cop my dick, “I’ll give you better head than any broad,” *Fucking-A!* somehow it all repulses me. “Man,” I say, “I don’t have any time for that shit. Get your ass outta here.” The dude, named Clovis, called Betty, walks away nonplussed. He just saunters out of the shower stall as if I hadn’t spoken to him at all. As if I hadn’t turned him down cold. As if he believes I’ve said no but meant yes!

I finish showering and go back to my cube. On my pillow I find a dandelion. *Christ!* Does that get a rise out of me. That hustling motherfucker. I certainly want to kick his ass. Who the hell does he think he’s playing around with? Angered, I check the activity in the dorm and find Clovis to be nowhere. So I dress and get ready for supper.

Jared walks into the dinner line. “Eh, Strauss, how’s thing’s going, ya little *muddafuckar*?”

“Not bad, man. Say, I’ve got this book on Minoan art that isn’t due back for another two weeks. Do you want it?”

“Sure, man, cool, just drop it on my bunk.”

Slowly inching through the chow line, Jared’s mind starts to wander. It jumps aimlessly from trivia to trivia. *Did I get my letter to Char off last night? How many clean shorts do I have left?* On to things like whether he should get his hair cut or moustache trimmed or what kind of stupid work he has left at his clerk’s job. Near the third circling of trivia mountain, Matt steps up right behind.

“Evening,” he says, “I’ve been trying to find you all day. Where’ve you been?”

“Me? Christ, I’ve been around in the open. At my job, reading. On the Circle. Where were you looking?”

“Doesn’t matter. Just want to talk about this new guy, Filbert.”

“Filbert?”

“Just a kid who’s come in on a six. Out of Larson’s court.”

“Six months. Another one of those, hmm? Run it down, what’s the beef?”

Matt moves in step with Jared, talking all the way through beef and spaghetti into veggie delights and en route to their table.

“This kid Filbert’s really flipped out on Jesus. Since he’s gotten in, he’s been rapping about how he’s going to die in prison. How it is that Jesus died in the clutches of the political powers like Pilate, and how he knows, really knows, he’s meant to die in here. Gee-zus, what a guy! He got a guard really rattled since he ran this number down on him. How he’s prepared to die. The guard didn’t know how to take him. Whether he’s psycho or something. I hear they’re going to put him in Seg.”

Matt pauses. “You should talk to him.”

“Aw, fucking shit, you know I’m trying to get away from all that Jesus crap. The kid’s probably a Jesus freak. All mind-boggled with half-assed quotations from the Bible. I doubt if I could get through to someone like that.”

Both of them remain quiet as they inhale their skimpy meal. Finished and looking far away Jared probes, “Is it Jesus or something else?”

“Glad you asked. I can tell—I knew you’d go see him—man, I think he’s afraid of being raped.”

Jared curses himself inwardly, picks up his plate, taps Matt on the top of his head and leaves.

Matt knew that Jared couldn’t *not* see the kid.

Back in the dorm Jared readies his mind for visiting Filbert.

*Christ, oh sweet Christ, you motherfucker, why’d’ya allow yourself to get so fucked up in people’s minds? Isn’t it bad enough a few of us go out and hang our asses like you want us to? Why the fuck don’t you keep yourself away from the Devil’s magic?*

*What type of kid am I going to find? Someone who believes he has a personal relationship with you? Someone who feels he has met you—met you in some freaked out abyss of his shallow mind?*

Jared thrusts a fist skyward, then gives Jesus *the Finger*. “You crummy bastard, I wish you were a person. I wish you did actually exist in the flesh, right now. Fucking-A, dig it! I’d punch you in the mouth!”

Jared’s pissed. *How often has it happened this way? That I have to confront my own limits with a rush of mad words? When will I have peace?*

Since coming to prison Jared’s put himself to the final test. He spent his first months as if in graduate research. He read the Bible thoroughly, plowed through the standard theological texts, devoured Gilkey’s *Naming the Whirlwind*, spent tedious hours in the nooks and crannies of process philosophy and language analysis. After three months, after being driven to a state of haggardness and exhaustion, he concluded that he had to trash his theological armor.

All his life he’s jousted encased in it. Flung its daggers of doctrinal and dogmatic insight. Even soulfully wounded his opponents. But what was it now, in here, but the language of mad monks? Those soulfully starved aesthetes. Hollowed-eyed flagellants flailing at the warmth from their loins? *Christ, what a bout that was*.

Often Jared likens himself to Job. Job wrestling with God. Job afflicted with sores and diseases, with all types of calamities befouling and befalling him. Job, the steadfast believer in his own powers of understanding. “Curse God and die!” How often those taunts of Job’s wife seep from his pillow! *Curse God and die!* *Why don’t you curse God?*

“I don’t curse Him,” he answers himself, “because He isn’t there! As simple as that. The great Jehovah isn’t there. When I utter my curse, it’s just a breath on my own face.”

Now he has to go and face a kid who’s using God for all the camouflage He offers.

A few hours later, like a badly bruised survivor of a car wreck, Jared returns to his bunk. Having seen the Fear, now he knows that *he* has it, not Filbert. Once again the negative force transferred itself from a lesser body to his own. Once again his night will be the battle wherein the eagle claws his liver.

*The dandelion mounts itself upward, reaching with its golden feathers towards the endless shine of the sun. Its magnificence sheds a glistening shroud of gold. Towards Betty, Jared moves. Towards Betty, the ever-faithful. Aside the emerald stem she stands, right hand on its round firmness, she pauses and smiles at him. Not smiles—no, she radiates her intense pleasure. Jared is impassioned at her sight. Never has he seen a body so beautiful. Naked with but her hair combed forward touching her eyebrows, she is a cameo of the exquisite.*

*Closer he moves, but the distance between them doesn’t lessen perceptibly as he walks. Energetically, he moves his feet, going from a walk to a stretching stride. But he still doesn’t gain ground. A terrible shame rifles through Jared’s body. A bolt of unworthiness smites him. Eyeing her still standing there, still radiant, still exquisite, he bends forward and thrusts his body into a run, moving himself faster and faster, straining as his arms fling themselves backwards and then forward. No matter how he strains, no matter how much he wills it, his pace seems not to move him any farther. A shrill anxiety overcomes him. He stumbles to the ground, face on the dew-wet grass, and a drilling pain strikes his nape. Rising to his knees he cups his mouth and yells, “Betty! Betty!”*

*Betty remains there, exquisite cameo.*

*Jared racks his lungs. “Betty! Betty! Don’t leave me! Betty, come to me! Betty, oh, Betty!” He bursts into a bellowing sob, “Betty, I love you.”*

*Betty smiles from afar. Painfully, it seems a smile he can almost reach out and caress. Then—gasp!—she turns her back.*

*Jared is forlorn. His begins to slide backward, backward, downward to somewhere he doesn’t know.*

Kicking the covers off Jared lurches from the bed. “Christ!” he mutters lowly. “Fucking shit! What’s going on in my head?!” Sitting at the bed’s edge he fishes among images of light and darkness, casting with an almost panicked hand, happy to snare something, anything, even bottom grass, something to tug himself back up to surface reality.

As he emerges into a fuller wakefulness, he feels the dampness of his body, a total spray of sweat spotting face, hand, arms, tingling his soles, and so reaches for a towel. Then, as if the Novice Master has just jingled his bell intoning, “*Benedicamus Domino”—response, “Deo gratia*”—Jared stands up and with a faithful and practiced hand remakes the bed, hospital corners and all. It’s his way of working to banish the dream. Completed, he slips on his shorts and walks out to the TV room.

Luckily, the TV room is only partly filled with late-night movie watchers. Jared looks around for someone to pass a bit of time with. Sitting in the back at a table writing a letter is Matt. Jared sits down across from him. Matt nods and continues writing. With a signature flourish he finishes the letter. Then, as per censor regulations, Matt puts his name and number at the bottom.

“I talked to Filbert tonight.”

“Good thing, how’d it go?”

“Man, much like anticipated. The kid’s hanging on to some thin threads. He sort of picked up on Jesus when he found out he was drafted. He’s quite freaked. Man, he didn’t say it that way but I put it together that he was.

Matt puts his letter into an open envelope.

“See, he found this group of socially minded Jesus freaks and began to go to Bible sessions. What he’s picked up is the usual amalgam of Christian tidbits wrapped in a mad emphasis on the Second Coming. Filbert, *sweet Jesus!* The kid actually believes Jesus will be coming back in—let’s see, I think he said, 1981. Can you believe that? Dig it, one stone crazy motherfucker! Yeah, somewhere ’round there. He has this rap about how the war and corruption in government and all fits into biblical prophecy and that *The End* is near.”

Matt doesn’t respond. Finishes his task. Addresses the envelope but doesn’t seal it, per the censor. He places this one next to two others.

Jared goes on, “The twist Filbert brings is really peculiar. His group believes they’ll all die before Jesus comes again. Far out for sure. It gets better! Most believe they’ll die at the hands of the government. Filbert believes he was sent to die, *here*. But the kid’s so terrified about everything—about dying, about prison—that all he can do is talk about it and pray.”

Matt leans forward, places his right hand on Jared’s shoulder. “Do you think he’s worried about getting raped?”

“Fucking-A, you bet! Don’t know though. It’s six of one, half a dozen of another. He’s small and fair-haired and all that. All the stereotyped stuff. But he feels whether it’s rape or being beat to death—man, he’s really zoned! He’ll get it one way or another.

But I think he’s so weird, no gay in here will touch him. The kid’s so tight, I don’t think an electric drill could bore up his ass!”

Matt lightly laughs then switches the topic. “Are you going to get a visit this weekend?”

“Can’t seem to stop her. Char might come up. At least she’s going to if she can hitch a ride with Sean’s family.”

“Good. Despite what you think, it’ll make you less crazy—at least for the weekend!”

Done, Matt releases Jared, rises, snatches his letters and with a nod bids him a good night.

Jared hangs around the TV room until the last network goes off. He listens to the “Star Spangled Banner,” even lends a tiring ear to some rabbi’s “Thought for the Day.” Finally feeling weary enough to try sleep once again, he walks back into the dorm, stopping momentarily to hit the head.

Absorbed within himself he moves robotically but within an unguarded instance a slight twist of his head captures a glimpse of Betty!

She’s sitting on the can, all involved in a boisterous conversation with a black dude crapping in the stall next to her.

“You’re lying, just lying!”

Their laughter unnerves him and his stream runs dry.

“No I’m not. It’s true. They all love me!” This brings more laughter and purchases a loving tittering. It’s just two dudes banging on the crapper walls as if stoned drunk and not knowing where they are.

“Oh, God do they ever love *me*!”

After the last urinal drop, Jared hurtles back to bed and rapidly binds himself with pillow and covers. To all accounts he looks like a mummy among so many in this jailhouse morgue. He falls into a deep sleep, head resting at the foot of the dandelion.

*Betty!*

## Last night before

Char’s room is Spartan, mostly window light nourishing several huge potted plants. Jared has come to be at home here. The simplicity comforts his spiritual sense. It’s unencumbered, a free sense, like the meeting place of security and death. Tonight, amid the shadows of swiftly clouding moons, he has passed towards the point of departure.

He hasn’t told her of the other woman whose specter has recently blown in on moonlight. It’s something kept down inside him, caught between guilt and his fear of losing her, of providing an excuse for her to abandon him.

She could never be unfaithful, is relentlessly *there* for him. But he knows that his infidelity, though only spiritual at this point, could conjure a chasm she could never leap. Such a chasm, he fears will be created by prison.

He leans over and tips a fifth of rotgut whiskey his way. Its power obliterates these confessional thoughts. He wants this night to be *The Night* he can dream about for a long time, from now through prison time.

Off and on he props himself up on an elbow and strains to hear the anticipated sounds of her presence. But she isn't there. He’s mistaken again. The chorale of street noises harmonizes with one loudly humming streetlight. He lies back onto a pillow, turns onto his right side, thinks about sleep, something short, *thirty z’s maybe*. He wants to be rested when she does come. But nothing lulls him. His mind’s a dazzle of images, his body a milling mob of emotions. Soon, he dreads, only too soon he will be sleeping back in a cage. That’s merely a matter of hours. *Merely*—Christ, how he has dreaded this night. The night before surrender. How often he’s wondered how he would feel this night. Whether he could carry off the matter.

The bitter whiskey stings but it helps his mind become merciful. The moments and hours begin to fill with nostalgic remembrances of Char. He had met her just after his father's death— she had simply appeared, as if she was to be *there* for him now that Dad was gone. She didn't like him at first. All that to him seemed romantic and manly she spurned as bombastic and juvenile. His sharp wit she assessed as humiliating sarcasm. His bodily strength and vigor wearied her—just another onslaught by a bullying male, stalking her, primed to snag her and pin her with his name tag. “God, you're a damn man-eater!” She hadn’t like that remark.

A bemused “Hmmm. Ha!” marks his recall of their first confrontation. Jared prided himself on his cleverness and imagination. He besieged her with flowers and “love cards” gushing with volcanic emotions and protestations of unquenchable desires. He played all his male tricks. She rejected all of them and him!

Cleverly, he had tried to throw her off with the highly charged “man-eater!” which he thought was a most damning stereotype. It was a calculated trick—he expected her to be horrified by this *unfeminine* label and fly back into his arms. But Char had not rebounded. She didn’t even reject the stereotype. Just said, in her distinctive, maddeningly gentle way, “I *am* a man-eater. What of it?”

To say that Jared was staggered is to fail to capture the reverberations within his psyche. “Why should I marry you? So *you* can eat *me*?”

Jared didn’t have an answer for that then, and he doesn't have one yet. “You’re right about that, I want to eat you!” is what he could have said, wanted to say, feels like saying tonight, but he senses that it was and is the wrong answer.

*A man needs to feel that his woman is* his*, with the same feeling and satisfaction of rubbing his belly after a great feast!* is what he truly believes. What’s wrong about that? He senses that Aaren would agree. He just knows that she wants to be eaten.

But Char . . . *Char, god how you have turned everything upside down!* For the past several years she has chewed up every male thing Jared has done. She was a feminist before the word was coined. It was instinctual with her because, Jared avers, “She’s *instinctually* just.”

What he means is that she can sense an injustice, spy its most ghostly outline before it’s apparent to others. While in college at St. Clare's, an all-women’s Catholic school in southern Minnesota—a sister college to his own central Minnesota all-male College of Saint Clement—she was an early supporter of draft resistance. It wasn't the abstract issue of violence versus nonviolence that engaged her, as initially it had Jared. Rather, she was against all types of wars: political, psychological, and spiritual. What her Catholic background had given her, and something that is ever at her lips, is an unforgiving respect for every person, each of whom is a child of God, all of whom are members of the Communion of Saints.

Char's theology is more practical than reflective. From the driest, most abstract theological principle, she draws forth its nurturing spirit. She lives from her heart and will put up with no foolishness of the mind that would sanction a “Just War” against anyone.

When Jared met her she was working on a health project for migrant laborers. During the prior decade Mexicans and other Hispanics became the mainstay of the migrating crews that swarm the North Country during planting-to-harvest time. They cluster in the oldest and poorest parts of town. Char was spearheading an unpopular campaign to make their presence known and to provide community-based health care. Within that cause she confronted, for the first time, the depths and complexity of injustices to women. “Mexican Catholicism gets them with a double whammy. They're supposed to be both the Virgin Mother and the cathouse whore.”

Cut from a different cloth, Jared was born in high gear. Folks who meet him either strongly like him or can barely tolerate him. There’s little middle ground. He attracts and repels with *intensity.*

Intense. Intensifying. These are the words everyone would agree *define Jared*. Vortex. Maelstrom. Even in times of passivity he’s a luring sinkhole, capturing people like he does ideas, almost organically; he ingests them.

As such, his inability to quickly understand Char, to inhale her, consume her, to make her part of himself, frustrated the living hell out of him. It went against all he had thought was properly male. He had expected her to be *his* woman, his “future wife,” to “win” her over and assimilate her within his life, on the spot. But it’s still not going that way. “Why do you stay with me?” he often asks after their bouts. She never gives him a satisfactory answer. Yet somehow, Char is stuck on him. Splattered inside him and breathing his breaths. He, likewise.

Typical of the times, it is with S-E-X—largely written in capitals across the era—that they struggle. Early on, the sheer athletic vigor of Jared's coupling hewed them. Char had never encountered such frenzy on the intimately physical level. At first she found his hard pressings on her, his exploration of her every part a bit comical, as if he were a mad potter endlessly kneading his throw. Yet the sheer exhaustion induced by his relentless erotic explorations yielded a sense of drenched satisfaction that she came, in time, to eagerly desire—despite her post-coital aches and pains.

As they both became more familiar and easy with one another, Char perceived the deeper character of Jared’s raw yearning. He sought transcendence within her. Desired to pray her. Sex for him was a communion that was more than the linkage of two— it was a whole greater than the tally of its parts.

“I want *this*!” expresses his desire, which her eyes silently celebrate. It is to this raw yearning that she so passionately responds. It unleashes “her intoxicating presence.” Together they get drunk each with the other.

Physically, Char is tall, as tall as an average man, taller than most women, with an Appalachian slenderness that belies the strength of her grip and embrace. She possesses a dancer's grace that both protects her from Jared's often mislaid ferocity and enables her to artfully pleasure him by small movements.

For Jared, Char is the canvas. Together they are an expression, an artistic creation. Char, while not a Free Love advocate, is more open to that cause. She’s drawn by its element of freedom for the individual but equally by its exposure of sexual injustices. She made pioneer contact with the oppression suffered by battered and lesbian women. In such settings she learned more about what she did not want than about what she did. More, she also discovered—at times with a flood of blush—about what others actually did!

She heard tales of horror and humor, all the time marveling at all that her Catholic education had not told her about men and women. She muses, “They never offered a course in *Sexual Athletics,*” and shakes her head in bewildered laughter as she tries to picture Sister Benedicta marching out her famous audio-visual aids for such a lecture.

The first time she stayed on top—all night long!—it opened an avenue for unmapped communication. It spiritually reorganized things for Jared such that he was dumbstruck. It had, quite literally, turned their world upside down. It was a small gesture, something she had asked him to consider. *Oh, Jesus, it* is *the little things she asks me to do that turn me inside out, upend my world!* He remembers the moment ever so clearly.

“Just lie back. *Relax*,” she says, and he cooperates. But every fiber of his mind and soul howls with a fear of slow death through torture. He moves, glacially, from resigned acceptance of the gesture to a yanking revulsion as she drives herself onto him, slowly, patiently, with total control. He squirms and sweats, imagines ejecting her—*blast! splat!—*up to the ceiling as he feels a loss of sensation in his penis, which is mocked by her gentle whisper, “Who has the cock now? Who’s fucking who?”

“Just lie back. *Relax!*” This and so many other little things she says that rock him: “I’m not a housekeeper!” “I will always keep my last name!” “I can open doors for myself!” “You go shave *your* legs!”

*Just lie back …* It’s an act only trivialized by comparing it to the effect Jared felt in church when the altar was turned towards the people showing if not the face of God at least the face of the priest—the visage of the sacred. “Who has the cock now?” Yes, yes, at that moment he sees the face of this woman as if she were Goddess. *Awesome!* He becomes Earth, she Sky.

Ever since that moment he has struggled mightily to express how majestic she is, but words mightily fail him. He knows only this as absolute truth—sexual intimacy with Char is an act of worship.

Jared admits only to himself that Char is his equal in most every way and superior in what he holds is his forte—the realm of the spiritual. She’s two steps ahead towards where he wants to go, if he'll ever get there. Humbled is how he feels. But he’s too embarrassed to voice this—*Pride?* *Stupid macho ego?*

Oh he so deeply knows that he needs her, wants her so badly regardless of how painful her truths can be. She even—*and during the trial, goddamn her!*—began criticizing the Resistance as a male movement, not just in terms of bodies but in terms of its power vision. “Cowboys and John Wayne, that's all you guys are!”

This slashed him deeper than she knows. *God, what do we agree on?*

Protectively, for this special night, he banishes that thought. Forbids the whispers of memory from Bruiser and Dikbar to defile the moonlight. He searches for some more pleasurable remembrances. But nostalgia has deserted him. The haunting fears about whether he can handle prison return.

Throughout this special day, and intensifying with the darkening, those fears have settled upon him; piled up. And here on his last night of freedom. *Freedom?* What a queer word. But freedom in a very real sense. Free to dress as he likes, to speak where he’s invited, to sleep with Char...truly, very many freedoms. But a profound doubt, accusatory, rips through him now as it did after every preachment. “Is all that I’m doing a subtle suicide?”

Such thoughts cease as the dark suddenly murmurs a familiar metallic whisper. Char is fumbling with her keys in the broken-light hallway.

Char’s dark shape wavers within moonframe. Slowly, towards him, shifting sideways and upwards as scarf, jacket, hat are removed, a dress drops to the floor, crouching discards a shoe. Her face clears only when she kneels close to him.

“Jared, are you awake?” in a whisper.

“Yeah, babe, I am,” steady and solemn.

Her voice is weary but strong. “Good. I was afraid you'd be sound asleep. Tomorrow will be such a hard day for you.”

*Hard day for me? Gentlemen of the Council, fathers, brothers, can you feel my pain? Oh, my heart once again is stabbed. Fathers, brothers, can such a woman as this be justified? Is she fit for bearing our seed? Listen closely to her vile intentions.*

“It's already a hard day for me.” He sucks in a long breath. “It's probably 2:30 and you're just fucking and truckin’ home!”

“Stop it!”

“Bullshit, I won't stop it!” He sits up in anger. “Why should I? You've never stopped it.”

“What?”

*Fathers, brothers she is beautiful I'll grant, but . . .*

“Don't fuck with me woman, you're a cool mean bitch.” The words lie upon him in pain. “I've been here all night waiting for you, waiting for some tenderness,” he sneers at himself. “What a fucked up nostalgic shithead am I—oh Christ!”

*Gentlemen, fathers, brothers, these tears of mine are weighted in stone.*

It is no longer night. The darkness has no more to say. The moon is not noticed. All is merely the bed and he and she.

“Jared, I love you.” *Pause*. “Why do I always have to tell you that? Over and over? Why tonight? Why every night?”

“Fuck it, Char, fuck it all. Fuck it all! You and I simply don't live on the same planet. Jesus, woman, tomorrow I'm going to prison and all you care, all you fucking do, is go to *meetings.”* Then he gets downright nasty. “Ratting and tatting with your bitchy queer friends.”

“Stop it! Stop it!” Char stands and grasps a window's ledge. No light comes to her eyes, but the warmth of darkness soothes her. A jagged silence vibrates between them.

“Jared,” spoken smoothly and firmly, announced, “I love my Sisters and I want to be, *will* be, with them for a long time. It’s real, you're going to prison but—but we *are* in prison. I have always been in prison.”

“Aw, fuck that shit.” He flips over backside towards her. She lingers within moonframe, and its lunatic power holds them both—burns this moment of departure into his memory.

The plants may have recorded this night, their leaves forever marked with the pain, but for him and her the event would ever be an incomplete memory. In the small awakenings of restless sleep they touch in the fear of departure. *Fathers, brothers, be not misled by her sense of duty!* There is no hesitation in her acceptance. She responds to him openly, accepts him within a shared imprisonment. She senses that together they are inside the Iron Cage. He, a new inmate. She, in the process of escaping her captors. Jared's mind labors, processing the ancient symbols. He desires to quench his thirst with familiar wine, feast on god in familiar bread. He needs to plow, she to be his field. He needs to hammer, she to be soft wood. He needs to smear her smell and taste, gasp and groan, push and grab all over the body of his memory. He needs his nakedness defined in terms of the Old Way. Fearful is he of forgetting, of being unfaithful to their newfound creations of intimacy. He needs to eat. Consume. Satiate.

Char accepts.

Jared’s lips suck hard upon her mouth. The strength of his tongue excites her. To this familiar place, once more, she will go. From within her desire speaks to be claimed. Ever hungered again and again he leaps from darkness into her fire. *Such eyes to probe!* Mystifying soft-green, almost sad, alluring in innocence. Deeply he plunges, all his bearing unmarked yet with hands and thighs following familiar scents. To breasts with softness sucked through his lips, swallowing her gentle nurture, spinning his thoughts to Mother and moving in worship to her folds, moist gates of redemption.

Accepting his weight, preparing for his search, her hips cradle him, embrace his hard driving, his wrenching throttling of her skeletal self. She desires to flow through him. Pore to pore, seeping into this man who might well be her only child. So the Sisters had encouraged and approved this dutiful resignation.

As he was blind at birth, so the man-child fumbles at his departure, wrenching sublime joys amid heartfelt pains of sad farewell. He arouses the token of her maleness and shakes it, storm and thunder, ground shudders and rivers burst. Breaths like electric gasps. Thighs liquefying, splattering succulent juice. Arms braced against backboard she wraps him with her legs, cloaks him. Waves foaming onto shore, all light shattered, his sagging and moist skin within her. Without pause, passion's gravity forlorn, he journeys down the spice of face, lingering in scent of breast, licks across the sweat of belly and the pit of coupling. He kisses her muff. Tongues her deeply, thrusting, merging lips of Earth and Sky, to savor the fragrance of departure. Gently to her thighs, a kiss to her calf, her foot, her toes, he salutes her, departing in the feeble light of sunrise.

Jared sleeps, the desperate sleep of the caged. Already, she realizes, he is in prison. She, whom he calls *Soothing Water*, touches him. Watches the fire seep from his flesh and encircle her hand. She loves his intensity, is nurtured by his decisiveness. She will miss their differences, for she, like him, needs flint to strike fire. But most of all she will miss his zaniness and his compassion.

She remembers—Jared putting light shades on his head, hoisting an imitation Fidel Havana cigar and lampooning so, so serious Marxists—at an SDS meeting! And Jared playing with kids! The big galoot just loves kids and he's on the floor crawling around, making weird popping noises with his mouth, blowing their bellies, playing the giant and swinging them high and low, throwing them up like baseballs and catching them amid the giggles and giddy laughter that Jared always seems to bring out from kids and even jaded intellectuals.

More, she remembers that he is a gate-crasher, a boundary breaker, in his own way a serious comic. It’s curious, so she has found, that he bounds from the comic always to the sacred—or at least with her from the comic to the sexual to the sacred. “Gosh, I'll really miss his laughter!” *And my own*, she realizes.

Yet how hard all this will be on her is a thought she sees as too selfish to ponder tonight. She prefers to think about the thousand ways he has intruded on her life. Positive ways. Manly ways. Helping her with this and that. And never seriously threatening her. In fact, he's so much the little puppy, always looking at her for approval. “God, how his eyes just glow and swell with just a little *thanks...*always wanting to seal it with a kiss!”

*San Francisco*. How could San Francisco not come to mind tonight? It was the time when she knew they were specially made for each other. He so impressed her. She—who as a nurse seemed always prepared for such things—had forgotten to pack her monthly equipment. And here they were, a most beautiful night, splurging on a week by the Bay and she flowing like lava. Can she ever forget? It was late at night and he walked with her, chatting and being playful, through neighborhoods neither knew, trying to find a store, any type, for it was almost midnight. He asks, “Are you okay? Want to sit down? Need a coke?” How strange. Who would believe this story? He ministers to her. She knows that that night she became his goddess.

And he would come to her. *Anytime*. Wade into the River of Blood to meet her. Always looking for his pleasure through her pleasure. *Oh, how lost*, she knows, *he will be!*

Such stories would perplex those who habitually comment on how oddly coupled they are. They see him as all brash and bluster, jock and wild-eyed heretic. She as soothing and nurturing, a healer and calm visionary of a Sisterly New Order. Few see him as she does. But such is their peculiar bond.

It’s a bond that does have its oddly coupled side. Truly, as tonight, it’s a bond that has almost always to be forged, to be re-created in the mist of red-hot iron being tempered by cool, sizzling water. She knows he calls her *Soothing Water* and this stirs her as she visualizes a final ritual. *Around him and above him she hovers, dripping her flesh, puddling him, making a cast of her flesh in spirit water upon his muscles, bones, breathing. She will never not be with him now and forever.*

At breakfast neither speaks much. Their embraces are few, nostalgic and routine. The ritual of spouses. The clock time comes as often it has over coffee cups and newsprint. There is nothing for him to take along. It’s a journey without any luggage.

At the anticipated time both rise and step towards the door. Jared turns towards her, reaches and grasps her hands, raises and holds them close to her eyes, moist, misted—in tears, sparkling flickers of peridot—and kisses them. “I love you,” opens the door and moves on. His imprisonment is begun.

As his footsteps fade to silence and the door creaks no more, Char weeps, softly and slowly, leaning her slender length against the hard wooden doorframe. She is now separated from him but she is not alone. Fulfilling his greatest desire, she has joined with him in spirit of memory and dream. That she could not tell him *this* is but her acceptance of their shared imprisonment. Such is the wrench of yoking that is communion.

Char crosses her palms upon her slight belly and mentally prays that there soon will be two with whom she is about to be born anew. She is his body, he is hers. She wants it to be so, wants a child who will be them both—*we*. If they are so blessed, the child will be the bridge between their long time apart, a gangway between their prison cells, that under which *Soothing Water* will flow and heal them both.

## Coldwater flat

“You’ve got a son!” Jared didn’t die but he had fainted, right there on the dirt road by the barn. Char had kept this secret all during his time in prison. How did he miss reading between the lines? For days Jared sits by an open window and reads and re-reads the copies Char made of the prison letters she had sent—those which “the Man ate!” As his visit to her farm ended, she gave him several small boxes. “You certainly came prepared!” he laughed. Now as he reads, he muses, *Clever as a fox, that girl!* He admires her foresight and cleverness. “Damn, Char you actually beat the fucking-A system, babe, out-manuevered the censors. Damn, girl!”

Jared winces at the memory, his own stupidity. He had argued with his rap partner that the Hacks would fuck with the mail. Matt: “Come on, man, you’re getting paranoid. They can’t do that. We have rights even in here!”

A sudden sliver of wind blows an updraft, rustling a loose stack of letters. A handful of pages flutter away. Jared hurriedly catches them all, before any fly out the window.

Each letter refers to and expands upon the storyline that took form during their very first visit Inside. That her Revolution took a heartfelt lesbian turn. She wrote, time and again the key line, what to him is *the line* that marks the road taken, “I must find out, explore the meaning of *I am a lesbian!*”

Jared holds up the letter with that line. Says out loud, sincerely, resigned, “Babe. Blossom, babe. Love and blossom!” He pauses, can’t seem to put the letter down, tears well up in his eyes, he bursts out sobbing. *Looking at the letter, sobbing*. Hand shaking he lays the letter down, back-hand wipes his eyes, looks outward and upward, “The Revolution, babe. It fucking-A hurts!” Gathering himself, he knows he has to get out of the house for a bit, go for a walk.

Somewhat later that same day, the letters find him practicing how he’ll talk to his family about the newfound son, Joey—answering their question, objections. He’s anticipating that visit, *Soon. Soon, Mom.* Hears himself saying, “Our son. The kid... Well, I’m as proud as the proudest papa’s ever been.” He knows that he and Char are cutting a radical pathway, one that will strike many in his family as incredulous. “Char’s going to raise him on her own?” He accepts that no matter how he’ll try to explain it, they simply won’t, can’t get it. All that he knows to say is, “Physical proximity doesn’t ensure spiritual closeness.” He’ll tell them, “Me and Joey, we’re a fillip, a cosmic sound. I’ll father him as fervently and soulfully as life allows.”

Jared had gone down to the farm to find closure for his relationship with Char. On the other end of things, he’s waiting here inside his apartment for Aaren. He doesn’t call her; simply waits. *Karma, man, can’t rush karma!* A week goes by, then several—slowly. A month. Two. Early October. An early, bitterly cold frost comes, then an ominous snowfall, foretelling a long hard winter ahead.

Waiting. He takes no time for formal prayer. No recitation of the rosary. No jaunts on Eastern roads, no gurus...just a lot of music. No reading of any serious sort, just music: deep, velvet-blooded blues, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, BB King, old chain gang chants and the “smokin’ shooter” of Sonny Boy Williamson.

Blues and hot baths in an ancient funky tub that is his apartment’s one delight, sporadic but intense workouts, living off the food pantries, the Free Store, this church and that church’s charity, just getting by, blowing smoke up his parole officer’s ass. “Three interview last week. Looks promising!” Lying to the Man: He doesn’t care. He just waiting. All in all, a lot of just looking out the window onto Elliott Avenue. *Waiting.*

Early one day, the doorbell buzzes, wakes him. *Seven?* Not an ungodly hour for the working class, but Jared’s gotten used to snoozing till ten. *Who?* With two blankets, fake furs snatched from a pile of six or more, he wraps himself, half-assedly, cursing the cold uncarpeted floor, a brevity of curses to awaken the day, and with the look of a hung-over man, which he is not, he looks through the peephole.

*Aaren* stands there!

*Jennings, report to the visiting room!*

It what he’s been waiting for, but now that she’s here, he hesitates—more, he resists opening the door. *Aw, shit!* He knows that he can’t keep her out—*Karma*. So he unhooks the safety chain, twists open the door handle, makes a hurried turnabout and shuffles back to his room.

Aaren quietly enters and while he’s in his bedroom immediately goes about being Miss Nice. She starts up a pot of coffee using a banged-up, cratered tin percolator left by a former resident or maybe his landlord friend.

As the java bubbles and brews, she sets about tidying up this and that. Giving him a few minutes, she assumes that he’s dressed by now, possibly even shaved, so she brings the pot and cups to his room.

*Interesting!* She senses that no women have been here. There’s no perfume, either cheap or expensive. No telltale long hairs in the comb or brush loitering on his bed stand.

He’s sitting by a window, looking far away. She’s surprised that he’s no further dressed than when he came to answer the door.

“It is a bit chilly here. Are your windows sealed?”

“It’s okay.”

She slips off her overcoat, keeps her sweater on, and again starts rearranging this and that, tidying up the room just a bit.

“Only half-insulated. Your plastic sheets will need to be re-stapled soon. They say we’re in for a lot of snow this year,” she says as she hands him a cup. He takes it, she pours and fills it to the brim.

“Whoa!” as hot drops splash the back of his hand.

“Sorry!”

She sets the pot aside and sits on the floor, her back against his bed. *It’s barren*, she observes silently. *No. That’s not it. Not really barren, just sparse.* It isn’t ascetic as the way her place is now, a place consciously devoid of *things*. This room’s more just a dab of poverty. *His brother must be helping*, she doesn’t say, but knowing the Jennings siblings, she senses it’s true, although it’s not.

Jared settles on the floor too, back against the wall, directly across from her. The room’s narrow and he has to half-tent his legs not to kick her toes.

“Feel at home here?”

“It’s mine...sorta. Yeah.”

The psychic weight of the moment is almost unbearable. Jared doesn’t know whether he should try to lift up and throw the weight away or wait for Aaren to do something. *What?*

In unplanned unison, they blow, sip and then hold their cups in both hands. Out of nowhere, some magical bell must’ve rung because they both burst out laughing. Just laughing, trying not to spill their drinks. Slight teardrops hold at the corners of their eyes. He heaves a deep sigh; she too.

Without words, they hold their cups up to toast this moment. *Clink!* A sip, blowing, steam fluttering, they drink.

“Sure is hot.” She blows, popping a sound with her lips.

“Yeah.”

Nothing more said, all the way to the bottom of the cup.

*Oh, how I want to flee!* In chorus, two voices within them chime, but both stay put.

He knows that it’s his to open. A simple question, flat-toned, “Why are you here?”

“Because I love you.”

“Love?” Something within him fears the moment, wants to test it, throw some acid on it, make sure it’s real. *Am I dreaming?* With smart-ass tone, “What does that mean besides loss? Do you want to lose me?”

“I did lose you...and you me.”

“But I love Char, you know?”

“Truly. So do I.”

Jared wiggles about, but only to relax his long legs. He’s feeling the pin sticks and stabs of legs beginning to fall asleep.

She reopens, “I love Joseph, too.”

“You know his name?”

“Of course.”

“When?”

“A bit after you, when they came back from the farm.”

She’s sharply focused on his every movement, that of his left pinkie, the way his lips purse, the shrugs he gives to shift into a more comfortable spot. She reads his mind. *Her meeting with the feds at the Black Forest when she had betrayed him. Of course, how can he trust me so soon?*

Aaren startles him by picking up on these exact thoughts about her and the feds. “I tried to tell you in DC. That I had left everything here: Mao, the Sisters. I’m on my own. Believe it or not, I’m back in graduate school.” She stops, then, “Look, I’m not here to chit-chat. I’ve changed. Oh, Jared, how can I convince you?”

Having practiced this a thousand times, she is now ready, jittery but ready. “Everything the feds told you is true. All my Weather involvement, my betrayal of you, all—”

“Wargasm?”

Fingers like wings flutter to her mouth, a slight cough. “True.”

“Really?”

“Wargasm.”

“Humph.”

“What else? It *had* to be my journey, I mean, look, you and I both had to become warriors. To battle in the streets, under the sheets and inside the sanctuary. Isn’t that true? Don’t you see, we’re like mirrors to one another. And I—I—oh, how painful!—*only* when I had battled with all my weapons, only after I fired every stock of ammunition: bullets, bombs, knives, only then, only after fucking and being fucked, inside and out, only when I thought I had won, captured the warrior male and his fire in my every opening,” and she points, mouth, cunt, ass, hand, teats, lips, tongue, “only then did I experience defeat. Defeat and victory, what *is* the difference? You know that.”

Jared stands up and walks about, more like shuffling. “Ha! Maybe it *is* just like me, I don’t know.” Turns. “But I have to say, I’ve prayed—no, not with my monkish prayers but with the hope for a new fire—that you are who you said you were...back in DC, that is.”

Aaren stands and moves towards him. He holds her off at arm’s length.

“But let me tell you, I’ve seen myself from more sides now that I can count. I was turned inside-out and outside-in, almost crossed over—yeah, both crossed over to them and crossed the line, I mean,” and he’s no longer holding her off, she stands there, steady. “I mean, I betrayed myself. You didn’t betray me. I fucked myself. You didn’t fuck me. I—I imprisoned myself. You didn’t imprison me.”

“Amen,” she whispers, floats into his open arms, they embrace.

Hours, days, eons, timeless moments they are there, just there, waiting together.

It’s like they’re inside the Bright Cloud. All they’ve meant to one another, for good or bad. All that they’ve felt, from dark hatred to molten desire. All that they’ve sought to know, now opens to them. At this moment each senses that they are together, teetering on the verge. It is as intense as the stiletto moment back before the raid. Their hearts are pounding heavily, they know—*Yes!*—that they are about to launch forth on their personal Revolution. With intimate eyes they painfully see two broken-down, impoverished, damaged and crushed youths who have lost first bloom. They sigh, do not have to speak, it is simply known, shared. With heartfelt kisses they melt together for the first time ever as a couple.   
 “Beloved, Aaren. You are my beloved.”

Their hands touch, slowly they move towards the bed and ease down onto it. Minds, hearts, muscles, desires all gradually relax as they lie in each other’s arms and breathe together. For the next few hours this seedy and rickety bed becomes the cradle of their newly coupled impassioned and fiery heart. From within their embraces arise a twin-flame glow that bathes the room and lights up the morning sky.

Many a wind has raised embers to spectacular fire. Here rises a wind, a fiery daughter of *Ruah*, “The Rush,” that cloaking wind which moves lovers to huddle so close in intimate flesh and bone that the betrayals of the past are purged and the purity of that primal blaze which fashioned the heart of the First Lovers bounds free.

She is to him a box of precious gems, and as he opens her she bequeaths him gold. He is like the goldsmith upon her, lightly pounding the malleable metal, forming a necklace for himself from her kisses, drawing from her breasts light pearls. Sweet and salty he licks her, sucking from her soulfully healing milk, tapping into her warm heart-ways through her dark nipples and delighting in the softness of her hillock as with spring’s first grass, tender of shoot and blade, he feels her, pets her, and breast to breast they couple and lock on. She kisses him, his eyes the entryway to his soul, and she watches his hunger for her in the movements of his play. As he turns to her, she slips her hands under him and strokes him, raising moistness in her delta and crack-hardness in his shaft, and they roll to the side, playfully, tenderly stroking, kissing up and down, feeling electric thrills bouncing off their skin, static electricity *snap!* Their lips entwine, dip and dart. He is the strong west wind blowing the ocean towards her desert and she is the hot flaming flashes darting from the wilderness, seeking his cool embrace. Deeply they enter each other’s intimacy, pressing cheekbone to cheekbone, legs latching, arms pulling ever closer until they almost pass body through body! They laugh, gasp for breath, he licks her ear lobes and she palm-surfs on his back, fingers dive and pinch his buttocks, loving the length of him, feeling buried by him but not submerged, actually emerging through him, and he is molding her, moving her soft-lands and entering into her, right hand calmly touching her panther hairs, parting her and feeling within her, finding that wet warmth which enters his hands and fills them with artist’s power, for he moves her and she is pleased. He presses her clitoris and she is aroused, heat sears from her loins and he finds her liquefying and he sways and swings around, lightly, finger-tips tenderly massaging her clitoris then thumb on top and fingers inside he ups the beat, plays her like a fortissimo piano, all the while kissing her on cheeks and neck and tongue caressing her now fully raised nipples and she finding that he’s falling into her, following her lures, coming to rest, that he is listening to her music and he’s down upon her sirenic mouth and she without pause and within the beat has him hard to suck, and they lie there joined as only humans join, in that embrace of divine coupling that celebrates the erotic power of cock and cunny, intensifying that coupled charge, transforming flesh into heart, heart into soul, soul into flesh of a newly birthed presence—the twin-flamed lover. It is a magical moment of *flash!* An unnerving moment of *love!* The delirious moment of two who are now coupled and manifest as one presence. *Yes!*

“I love you.” *You love me*. *Love!*

They are love, each to the other, they join fierce hearts to fiery souls, are the juice of life, flowing onto each other, bathing each other, raising each other, now rightly and newly named as *we.*

They rest, a long time silent, he drooping, nodding off, she elbowing him, smiling. “You know,” and he hears in her tone that her mind’s been racing around, doing what Aaren does—working out the ideological framework, the theoretical basis. So just as she begins, a huge broad smile whacks his face. She stops, “What?” He laughs, leans over, kisses her on the forehead. “Oh, nothing. Just that *it is you*, Aaren. It is truly you.”

“Hang in here with me, big boy, okay? See, I’ve been doing some of your stuff, believe it or not, theology and all that, myths, so look—okay, let me ask instead of tell—isn’t what we’ve been trying to do ever since we met—wow, seems long ago!—is deal with violence, really our sexual violence? We, you and me, we were mythic enemies, true Warriors of the Sexes.” He’s totally wrapped around every word she’s saying, with every syllable he’s falling more madly in love with her than ever before. “If, not *as*, I mean, right now, I know you’re here, just like me, to form a common life together, right?” He smiles. “So—” she pauses, waves her hand at imaginary demons: old Marxists, raving Maoists, all the Revolution’s crazies. “So,” she pauses again, places her hand in his. “Trust, my love—it is all about trust, isn’t it?” She sighs, he presses her hand affirmatively. “As we seek deep intimacy, we need to be aware of the mythic challenge. Eve was Adam’s enemy. I am not yours. You are not mine. So—” he’s waiting “—love as if you are no one’s enemy.”

As in the Bright Cloud, Jared is being drawn forward. Aaren’s heart is drawing him forward. “Fuck, man, that’s really beautiful.” Kidding, “Wish I had come up with that!” Tickles her. This breaks her serious mood. They tumble back into intimate exploration. Their fire burns, flares, roars, and by day’s end greets the night with glowing embers.

Aaren and Jared slumber, arms crossing and intertwining, legs laced, dreamers within each other’s dream, alive within, *Beloveds* who are together a virgin fire, twin-flamed.

*Love as if you are no one’s enemy.*

## D1-24-1992 spellcheckedreamslipping

“Love as if you are no one’s enemy.”

Jared and Aaren stand six paces apart and bow slightly as they say it. He folds his hands in prayerful gesture and then opens his palms, raising them high, looking intently, passionately at her. She, with hands at her side, steps towards him, coming to rest within his alluring gaze. He lowers his hands and cups her breasts. Slowly, they move towards each other, he inclining and she stretching up on her toes. They kiss.

Released, she turns and from the fireplace mantle takes off and sets in front of them a candle. Thick, three of his fingers thick and blood-red. Although she has blues and whites and all colors, today she selects as she feels, a darkling rose petal of the universe. Lighting it she says, “As we see our light, so let us recognize that it is but the center of our darkness.”

“Right. Truly.”

He touches her face, fingers slightly dipping and dotting her flesh like soft raindrops.

They make present the enemy each seeks not to become.

“You are daughter of Eve, my enemy.”

“You are son of Adam, my enemy.”

Then he places a small, round wooden block whose sides are inscribed with their names, gouged in trembling letters, stiletto scored, on a small table.

Against the wall, as the candle brightens, is cast their coupled shadow. *Flash!* Aaren detects Her presence, feels Her tangible touch, the room warms, for a moment Aaren is transported...but perplexed, bewildered, aghast, frightened, until she hears: “Daughter, heal the earth!”

She has come. They accept Her shadow.

“Love as if you are no one’s enemy.”

He has come. They accept His shadow.

“Love as if you are no one’s enemy.”

They kiss again. Then together bend and settle, sitting down touching her calves to his thighs, she pressing inside him, he like mountain cave, she like mist floating in on a brisk wind.

They sit quietly together, listening to each other breathe, consciously alert to the many little presences of the other.

Breaking their brief meditation, he picks up a peasant’s shawl which is in arm’s reach and draws it around them. It is damp with smells of past enactments, and its roughness matches their own state of desire: its fibers are coarse and uncolored, its state, raw wool.

She invites him. “I desire to become you...I desire for you to become me.”

He responds. “I desire to become you...I desire for you to become me.”

She’s a bouquet of flowers his arms have swept, magically, from out the air.

He’s a roar of thunder she’s drawn from the sky and tamed with sweet cooings of endearment.

For an unmarked stroke of time they sit, slowly allowing the other to fill up their senses. He is drawn by a faint scent of lilac, an indulgence she allows herself. This entwines with a slight aroma of herbs dancing on her softly hued black hair. Both mix with the dusty odor of her blouse, the residue of her day’s work at the school. It is her: Aaren in all her subtlety and complexity.

For her, it is his size that always impresses. Jared’s presence settles upon her like a cape. It’s as if he emerges from the floor, rising, hovering above, and his manly odor is all about her. It’s a mingling of naked heat and musty early evening manliness. Yet, now as always, she finds distraction in his eyes. They betray his mounting impatience. *He’s burning tonight!*

For him, her foot, still booted, resting high upon his thigh makes him shudder. He slips off her short furry mukluks, strokes her up and down, ankle to calf to thigh. He loves the swoop and naked line and up-rushing arch. It’s that which is source to her liquid movement. *Liquid Fire!*

In his mind’s eye, Jared is watching her walk in front of him and as ever he flushes from the sway of her. She moves as if about to take off—fly-up and away into the clouds.

He leans towards her blouse and unbuttons it. One at a time, while pulling the bottom out from her skirt. Having loosed her, he lets his arms fall away, so that she knows he wants to observe her, behold her with eyes admiring, lusting, hungry.

He patiently tracks her as she opens her arms and causes the shawl to drop and her blouse to slide fully open. In another practiced motion, she unclasps and frees her bra, half naked, ever a mite of flesh in comparison to him, but with every slight motion making present her inner vortex of yearning.

She stands, fully undresses, letting the blouse fall away, the skirt drop. He picks up her blouse, glides it over his face, rubs it into his beard, inhales her essence.

She invites, lures him. “I am candle...I seek the matchmaker...for I need fire.”

He kneels before her, struggles to discipline his hands—they seek to betray his iron self-restraint. Her mere presence easily sets him off on a wilding wide-awake dream. He is drowning in a torrent of erotic juice. His whole body is sodden, drenched with the sperm of a desire so strong he fears that his hands will disengage from his arms and tear her to shreds. He’s mad with desire to have her. Possess her. Penetrate her. It’s as if his toes are ten little cocks ... his fingers ten medium ones...his tongue a larger one...and his bodily self so large and gargantuan a penis that he bawdily laughs at seeing himself pull it up and position it atop her southern mound, there positioned like a phallic cannon all ready to *Boom!* But he has worked and labored to master himself and be here as heartfelt sculptor not as a fuck-warrior. He has, all day, warded off the many temptations to simply take her, have his way. He dispels, *Fuck the bitch!*

*Wait for the moment!* he reprimands himself. Through sheer strength of will he holds at bay the churning, ravenous monster moaning throughout his belly. *Belly. Grrr, I want to eat her! I want to be in her belly!*

The moment comes: As agreed, he repeats now what they’ve chosen to chant and image themselves with—*I love you. I am not your enemy.*

“I love you. I am not your enemy.”

“I love you. I am not your enemy.”

They do this to make present what is novel and fresh between them. Chant it because the sexually violent ways of the predatory Warrior are always there in their minds and hearts, as past is ever present and future ever past, and all must be acknowledged before they can be dispelled. “I love you. I am not your enemy.” Through this shared mantra, Aaren and Jared make conscious the sexual violence of the predatory Warrior. He who dominates and conquers her. *Rapes.* Who trivializes and casts off the females after she has quenched his sexual desire. *Booty.* Who obliterates any memory of Her or her as all he can see is Him and himself. *You are my flesh. You came from my rib!*

It is the mantra of a fresh beginning. It enables them to exit the mythic world in which they grew up. Together, they want this. To start anew. Be fresh bodies and souls, each for the other.

He half disrobes, exposing a heart-heaving chest, with thick pectoral muscles that flex and delight her. He kneels down again, kisses her, embraces, sighs. Standing back up, she un-girdles him, assisting as he steps out of his trousers, then both kneel. They kiss lightly, several times, then tear into a passionate dive, deep and deeper.

She pulls back, “Whoa!”

He says, “No whoa!” and eagerly tugs her back. But then he freezes. For she tenses, has a hand on his chest pressing lightly, holding him back. Her eyes are closed. Lips shut. It comes to him that his small act of lustful snatch has evoked a past act of violence—a strike at her person.

Both are on hold. They loom. He struggles with inaction. He wants to know her heart. He whispers, tenderly, “I am not your enemy.”

Within an awakening smile, she drops her hand, then places both on his shoulders. His fear recedes and they settle back and play a little. She runs a hundred nippy kisses like skipping stones on a lake around his lips and over his cheeks and down his neck, finally stopping for a large smacking suck on his neck. She kids him, “Oooo, a hickey for sure!”

*It is time*. He takes her hands, holds them and indicates with a head nod that he’s inviting her to bed. She flirts with her eyes blinking a shy, “Me?” He glares back a firm, “Yes, you!”

They lay down within the flickering candlelight and frisky splashes of moonbeams. Like jigsaw puzzles pieces they are a fit, one for the other.

He begins gently and tenderly stroking her body, all her length and fullness. She is eyes closed, allowing herself to be washed by the soothing energy flowing from his palms. His gentleness eases the tensions of the day and sets loose couriers to parts of her heart and soul announcing that the time is now ready to move with him to the next dimension.

He rolls her over and initiates a more serious search for her inner self. He begins to deeply massage her. This greatly pleasures him because it is a knowing of her that completes what he felt when he first called her Liquid Fire.

For him, she, her body, her skin is a great pleasure. As he presses a calf, hot sluices shoot up his forearm. As he tends her feet, taking each toe by toe and balling his hand to work the small of her insole, small fires flare-up, slowly, one by one burning a pathway zig-zagging up and through and all over the inside of his chest to his heart, fingers and palms radiating intense heat, he feels connected to her organs, as if moving through precious channels in her feet, touching from this lowliest of her earthly parts the fleshly innards which carry her intimate passions and store both her cool and fiery emotions.

As she relaxes, lets down her guard, his cock becomes primed to the point of self-propulsion, and it is here that he looks at her, helplessly, vulnerable and knows “One strike!” just one strike and “Take no prisoners!” and into her like a rampaging Warrior he could dive and from that dive delve into her passions through panic and fear and steal her booty! Take her prized womb and spurt all over it with his flags of conquest, ten thousand soldiers of sperm at his single behest ... he has to turn that violence of capture to capture himself, to let her have her body, not take it as booty, to feel the fullness of his cock and then slowly and carefully suck it back into his inners, re-deposit it in his erotic Cauldron, let it simmer and brew, so his crazy self of discipline agonizingly laughs, *It’ll be better the second time around!*

*Grrrr, he aches!* Tenderly, she’s aware of his long-suffering. Yet it must be so, for if they are to reach beyond, they must first find a balance—one of pain that carries deep pleasures. Quietly steeled, she has herself labored to trust his exploration and become each time increasingly more relaxed and vulnerable, pliable and submissive. *Open*—submissive to the greater force that they have conjured together. She knows that this simple body-wandering ritual is what he needs. That it evokes that something from beyond himself which puts him in touch with other phases of himself. It’s a ritual that holds him steady, for she knows the scorching wind that whips around him, and she knows she is this wind, she is not fooled by her own howling, that which she once acted out when at him with slash of stiletto, that which scarred him on his soul as another had upon his face, all this she knows, so now together they are a terror and as a terror the vendor of the most stupendous violence, more bombastic than any Weatherman booby trap, they together work towards the moment, drawing the darkness around and within, swirling it as to make fire, and she is at him as flint sparking against flint, her flesh is his kindling and he moves to her back, fierce fingers so delicate upon her, she is fully aware that with one snap, “Just a twist of his wrist. Exactly, he is that strong,” that’d she’d be dead, for she has been murdered within his embrace—finds ancient Sarah glaring at her in fright as Jared embraces as if she were the Lamb of Sacrifice—and she knows that he knows and that he trembles knowing that it is he who has the dagger always as part of him, his body being the dagger and the bludgeon and the axe, fully the Warrior’s instrument of murder, so does he find but they are finding it together through this ritual and their shared quest, this insight, this harrowing feeling that mingles dread, desire and delight at the instant moment before entry of each into the other.

“What is it that you see?”

He says, “Your heart in my hands.” Greedily, together they drip her blood into their mouths, she licking his arms and sucking the drops from his fingertips and together they return the heart, restore it as they enter, cock and cunny.

“Come touch my heart with your knife of flesh,” she invites, and he enters her deeply, feeling as if he is slicing her with his cock, entering he sees her halved and her heart throbbing, “Come touch my heart with your lips,” and he kisses her heart, “Come fill my heart with your blood,” and he sees the connection, himself sliding as penis attaching as artery and coming inside her filling her with sperm and she, “My heartbeat is your cock pulsing,” and he cries—sound like a sharp blurt as a rusty lock snaps and cracks open, then his tears puddle upon her breasts, his head now lies exposed upon her chest, she almost dead from his weight but holding him to herself with soothing pats, long and short, calming wild beard hairs and the Medusa flight of his head hairs ... he falls quickly into a depth of sleep marked not by time but by sensations.

He feels himself being bathed, as child in the baptismal font, as back one mystical day LSD-tripping in the Minnesota Northland floating in a lake with late afternoon sun and all the world glistening and he the lake, so it comes and he awakes so aware of the immediate, so sharply cut off from her, feeling the full weight of his frame and edge, he bolts away from her, *Gasp!*

Within this *Gasp!* she is all and more and he nothing and less. A mere carrier of dying seed, a seed that only lives as she so haughtily selects just one, a single servant, a slave to her passion for life, to impregnate her. In this *Gasp!* all that the Warrior fears is so deeply revealed to him, and he knows why the Male God lies about his body being the birthing body, why males fear the worship of Her through her body...*Gasp!*

Yet, it is exactly this for which he has come. Exactly this that all his time Inside has prepared him for. She is now his way to find their shared Inside, their intimacy.

He steadies his breath and slowly moves a hand towards her head, placing his fully stretched left hand upon her, sensing that he could palm her like a basketball, he works fingertips upon her scalp, moving like a tap dancer stepping this way and that over the long filaments of her raven hair, some matted by perspiration, he dabs at her forehead with his discarded tee shirt and rolls her back to front and kneeling upright, arms raised, he yells, “I am not your enemy! I am your dreamer!”

Enthused, he thrashes his arms about, jumps up and *Whoops!* into a wild dance, prancing from one side of her to the other, making unintelligible noises. “Whooos!” and “Booda boodas!” She giggles, he stops. “Funny? This is funny?” He plunges down upon her, faking as if to land on her but rolls with her back and forth lightly tickling, squeaking tiny laughs, for they have slipped through the comic knot, the absurd, the plunge into the giddy and the giggle as necessary moments of distraction that allow the fury of their passions to settle down. Settle but not die down! Rest a bit. All merely the pause before their quest begins, again.

For their quest is yet done. All has been but prelude. They are now poised to move beyond being sexual athletes whose “love-making” is all *Fuck!* and “mutual masturbation” and being sexual objects, erotic toys, one for the other. They know that moving beyond can only rise from within themselves. They seek *whatever it takes* to transform into, to birth and be birthed as a new body, as a coupled body. And it is working, for he has already added to their mantra a key that unlocks one more doorway through which they walk into a coupled freshness. “I am not your enemy. I am your dreamer.”

*I am your dreamer*.

They know that they want to stretch their bodies and souls for more. To become a fuller body: *coupled, cosmic, fresh*. They know that they must dream this body. It comes to them, mutually voiced, “Dreamslip. Beloved, let us dreamslip!”

# Part 2: THE INSIDE

To be true to myself and my Inside experience I need to enable you to directly feel being imprisoned. For that I’ve written a series of “Rung” stories. These are “dark side” vignettes that aim to stir-up a bit of emotional unrest which hopefully leads to some insights about yourself as you assess your heartfelt reactions to these Inside stories. You will go down three Rungs, slowly descending into the depths of the Inside to eventually end up “where everything human is soon absent.” This is definitely not a nice or emotionally safe place to be, but if you get there, you’ll certainly have escaped your everyday world. Believe me, these Rung stories are not ones that I find easy to re-read—as they are written in psychic blood and spit.

## Jail

For Nick, the first step Inside to start serving his prison sentence was going back to the county jail where he had spent seven days, held on the charge of “sabotage of the national defense” and before his bond of $50,000 was reduced to ten and he got out to prepare for trial. He knew that the county jail was a holding area. Most guys were waiting to get arraigned or for someone to post bail. It was also the way station on the road to the federal penitentiary, like a Greyhound Bus terminal—“Now boarding on Track Number 13!” He returned as “Guilty!”—convicted of a crime committed “by force, violence or otherwise.” Without fully assessing its import, he would henceforth remain classified as a “violent felon” for destroying the Selective Service’s “paper body” draft cards.

Every morning’s waking is surreal. His eyes snap open in reflex to some guard’s harsh yelling about something or at someone. In noisy tandem, a master control gate starts to groan, screech and clang, setting off a series of smaller metallic echoes as each individual cellblock cage clanks open in sequence. Guys clamber down iron stairwells to the common area to gather what the Keeper leaves. It’s breakfast or something like that. Soggy buns and weak coffee. Half-pints of warm OJ. Fatigued, Jared rolls off his iron-framed cot and soon joins the line shuffling towards chow. He’s ever amused: “Free room! Free food! Free TV!” Ain’t America grand.

Half-awake, Nick’s counting and this is the sixth day back Inside, a week of dawdling, on hold for the federal Marshal to arrive and transport him upstate to Sandstone, a medium-security prison. Back in his cell he plops down on his cot and starts eating but not before he gags a bit as the vividly acrid stink of his piss-soaked, lumpy and soggy, bug infested jailhouse mattress exudes a puff of fetid air that rises once again to dust him all over and around. Jail’s aroma of sanctity! *Hell, these aren’t cells, they’re cages in a stinking human zoo*. Iron bars at every turn. No walls between cells. Not a sliver of personal privacy possible. Total naked exposure: stinky.

Music soothes the wild beast? Set high on the corridor walls of the cellblock four TV stations blare at high volume from sunup to sundown. They are beyond reach, so remain locked on the same station. Their relentless drone is an irksome annoyance—a grating buzz! Each tier has but one shower which in no time is plugged up and flooding back. Plus one communal razor blade and a tiny Holiday Inn size bar of soap to wash and shave some thirty-plus men. Three times a day all line up—“Keepers” slop vittles on plastic trays. The stuff was without fail some wretched, overcooked gunk. If he’d crave a snack or a small luxury like a comb, he’d have to negotiate with the old black inmate “trustee” who runs the commissary.

The hours creep around, strangled by idling intensity. Nick looks about and knows that most guys are “career” criminals, ones statistically accounted as likely to never break the cycle of recidivism. He’s never remotely been in a place that seethes with such unrelenting negative energy. The walls, the bars, the bare light bulbs, the lidless crappers, everything screams out, “You’re a piece of shit, loser asshole!”

Nick’s feral outlaw brain gleans a lot. With eyes closed shut, the others are mostly black and/or poor. With ears deafened, the others are semi to completely illiterate. Without even bothering to voice the question comes the answer that very few inmates grasp the socio-political determinants of their being locked-up. Most just want to get back Outside and try once again to beat the odds. Should he opine, “It’s depressing!”? Or just cynically laugh? These are society’s dregs, its misfits, its dropouts, each an outlaw. Although they have “street smarts” they compulsively lose out to desperation—somewhat Pollyannaish they tempt fate time and again ever sure that they’ve finally found a short cut to the Big Kill. Ha. Too many times the short cut ends up being a gun or a fist in the kisser. *Christ!* Just another group of men constantly at war. Ha. He quickly assesses that his rap-partner-in-crime Mike and he are the only first time offenders on this cellblock. “Me, a stone cold jailhouse virgin!” Darkness relentlessly frightens and nightmares break him. He shudders and remains fitfully sleepy even when awake.

## Segregation

The keyhole is large. It’s the biggest keyhole Don has ever seen outside of one in a museum. The key is the size of a large screwdriver. It looks like an antique gourmet wine bottle opener, one of those corkscrew poppers fashioned like a large skeleton key. And here is the Corridor Captain taking this toy key, separating it from a ring crowded with all sizes and shapes, and actually opening a door. Dwarves in Toyland.

This guard is called Corridor Captain. “Wait here for the Corridor Captain.” That’s what the Admissions Officer, Mr. Erickson, ordered. So he waits. Waits dressed in loose-fitting khakis and glossy black shoes. Waits in his deodorized and disinfected body, having been sprayed for lice and bugs and whatever. Officer Erickson has purified him with an insect spray can. *Pump, swish*. Even around the balls and the asshole. *Pump, pump, swwwiiishh!* Up the arms to the pits and into his hair. “Hold your breath.” Swish and swish. Baptismal aspersion for the new order of the ages, “Novus Ordo Seclorum.”

Don had wondered if he’d be hassled about his hair. His scraggly dark beard and neck-tickling black tresses, a witness to the time between capture and caging and to his desire to once again look like a radical—these he submitted to a friendly barber several days before the day of surrender. He kept a moustache and broad-based sideburns—still looks good in a radical chic way. He was told that the lip hair and sides would pass prison muster. Still, he anticipated getting some flak, just some shit for disciplinary reasons. “You think *that’s* short?” They’d show him “short.” But no flak came.

What is more curious, if he’d had time to think about the rapid process, the mechanical answers and motions that he’s just undergone, is the total lack of hassle. His admission, purification, registration and allocation have been routine—by the book, as with any bureaucracy. No drama, no hazing, no screaming, shouting or beating. No Greek chorus at the Gate to Hades raising his conversation from the mundane to the sublime. He waits here*—no place to go, no place to hide!*—like standing in line at the Greyhound Bus depot, waiting for an ever late departure.

Most curious, it is monastically quiet in the Admissions area. Don is the single aspirant. The guard is lean on comments, more of a steely-eye than a talker. All in all, Don, now inmate 3714-324, is ready-to-go, as he supposes they see him. *One new commitment, ready to be released to the population.* These words float in his consciousness as he scans up and down the empty corridor. It’s empty because it’s chow time, a timing he doesn’t know but will soon. And this emptiness annoys him. *Where is everybody?* he wonders.

The windows before him don’t frame a view of too many people either. Furtively, a figure or two dashes at distant sight. *Inmates*, Don surmises because of the khaki blur. *Where is this population?* *How these guys play with words!* *Me, a new “commitment.” Damn, I’m not committed to them.*

“*You*,” an authoritative command snaps at Don’s consciousness. “You there. What’s your name and number?”

Don pivots towards the figure appearing at his right, a six-foot-five tower of military hewn flesh. Clean hands, clean face, cleanly shaved, cleanly pressed trousers and shirt, cleanly polished shoes, cleanly groomed hair. All clean.

Eye to eye, Don reflexively starts to greet him, “Hi!” and takes a step towards the Captain as if to shake his hand but something powerful holds him back; he freezes. *No, no, it can’t be!* The pains from the night of capture burst out all over his body. *Corridor Captain Quinn? Is this what you did after serving with the paratroopers in Nam?*

*Quinn*: The name, the spectral face pops up again, and once again Don’s consciousness pushes it, stuffs it back, deep down, way back into horrific memory. *Are you going to burn us?*

*Shut up, kid!*

*What did you do . . .*

*Me . . . Dad? No one believes me!*

But now it’s worse even than Quinn’s terror, for it’s a fright and a torment suffered only by those humans deemed disposable, worthless, expendable—society’s social excrement. “You’re nothing but dogshit in here, boy!” For the first time ever Don is beyond being powerless. “ . . . number?” He simply doesn’t exist. He’s been processed. Institutionalized. Digitized. Tagged. He’s nobody, invisible to all and to everyone he’s ever known. He’s being stored, stowed away, placed inside the alchemical vessel of social correction: *Inside*.

Again: “*You* there—what’s your name and number?”

His lips part but nothing comes out. His arms can’t move, remain locked around a bedding bundle against his lower chest. He’s at a loss for a long moment and an embarrassed blush flits across his face. But this too is sucked back. What stumbles out is, “Jennings ...err, 88...67...err...147.”

Unfazed by the faltering answer, the Corridor Captain motions Don towards the large keyhole behind where he’s standing. Holding up his cluttered key chain, the Captain isolates the giant key and with two hands in a practiced motion turns the lock.

Don steps into a single-bed cell unit. There’s only one other door on this floor, so this isn’t a cell block. *Isolation?* he wonders. *Whatever*, after the sweaty, cramped and odiferous cell block in County, Don is delighted to see that his stool comes with a lid. He holds on to his bedding bundle, turns towards the guard, and says nothing by mouth or face.

“Supper will be up in ’bout five minutes. Make the room.”

Then Corridor Captain Clean leaves. *Quinn drops the match on the paper stuffed between his legs, up his armpits and throws on more sticks. Threatens, “Stop moving or I’ll break your arm!”*

Alone, unmoving, Don eyes every corner, wall and facet of the unit. He is immobile, a sculpture lost from a museum. *So this is solitary? The hole?* Why he’s in solitary baffles him. *More of this Protective Custody crap?* Like a statue he doesn’t flinch or even squint when the food grate opens with a rattling squeak.

“There’s books here, if you read.”

He doesn’t answer. The grate closes on a ten-by-twelve-foot pastel blue cell: one sink with safety-glass mirror, one iron-frame bed, one barred window situated slightly above average hairline, covered with a length of steel screen, also pastel blue. The ceiling holds a recessed, wire-mesh-sealed bank of fluorescent lights—the on/off switch is outside the cell. The mesh is a matching pastel blue. *What the—?*

He demands to know as if addressing a bellman, “Is this the fucking Holiday Inn?” No one answers. Don remains at anchor, stuck there, bedding bundle sagging in his arms, scanning nervously, inspecting every detail, checking out the room like a wary traveler in a foreign land.

As the Institution intends, his is a fast check-in into depression. Ten minutes Inside and already he’s sinking into despondency. Pastel blue depression—a solitary color. Pastel blue and warm, inoffensive fluorescent lighting.

Mockingly, from the sole window a beam of sunlight cheerily gambols into this cell, delighting in the play of color, wrapped in a chuckle of sky, a bit of Minnesota’s chilled washed heavens.

Rage boils and bubbles from deep memory. *Powerlessness—absolute, utter powerlessness. Quinn’s terror.* Prisoner again—no way out.

“Jesus Christ, why are they fucking with me?” He tosses his bundle on the unmade bed. Its summer-camp bedsprings creak and squeal. Motionless again, he remains fixed to the spot.

Black, not blue—Don wants black. *Isolation. The Hole. It should be dark as sin.* He needs a touchstone. Blue’s all wrong. Blue is for babies, christenings and celebration. Blue is for wedding garters and silly escapades. *Blue is for the helpless. The weak. The powerless.* All he gets is wimpy blue, pastel blue. Right now he desperately needs something hard, harsh, painful, even punishing, to uncap the pressurized expectations he has brought with him.

*It’s all wrong!*

This is not what he expected. It’s unlike everything he was told. This is some demonic trick, fucking with both space and time. This is the Inside cruelty that he fails to recognize. It’s everything he thought prison was not; as such, it’s what prison *is*.

Everything looks normal. *Kids playing in an empty lot*. Everything looks tidy and smart. *Quinn stuffs the kindling neatly all around Don’s body*. Everything looks just like everything always looks. *Quinn is a good boy, he just has a bit of a temper.* Everything is pastel blue. *Crack!* Broken arm.

*Fucking pastel blue!* He whispers. Mutters. Spits it out. Yells from the bottom of his gut, “Fucking pastel blue!”But it’s more than just angry words—it’s a phrase of savage rage. He can’t bring Quinn into this place. Big enough to deal with him now, he’s *still* powerless to do anything about it. His fury over his impotence has to go somewhere else. Deep inside he knows he must turn his rage to *protect* himself, not harm himself. *Not in here*.

He booms, “God! I’m gonna be managed to death*—just like they manage the fucking war!*” He twists and funnels his rage at the war. “Vietnam isn’t real. The bigwigs in D.C. don’t want it to be real. They just want an exercise in Game Theory. No passion, no heart, so no need for tears. Just numbers and numbers and *numbers*.”

He splats fury onto the walls: “Numbers! 8867147—I’m a number!”

Powerlessness oozes from his every pore and he rages wildly, rages systematically. As if driven by ritual obligation, he turns and faces each wall: North, South, East, West. Ceremonially, a minute here, a minute there, he kicks and kicks and kicks against each blue wall until his legs hurt. Wobbly, lurching, he opens his fly and starts to ritually pee. Zips out his cock and pisses a stream here, a spray there, as if marking out his territory, setting warnings to intruders.

*A little nuts. Okay, man, I’m a little nuts*. Spent, he flops down on the bare mattress. Suffocates his face with the naked pillow. He needs not to be here, needs darkness, not pastel, just for a few quick seconds.

Act II begins: The Meal. The grate slides open, rattling a bit. The edge of a steel cafeteria tray gleams at him, flashing a toothy smile in the day’s soft light. Don gets up and pulls it in quickly. It’s a reflex. At County the guards would toy with guys. “C’mon, c’mon, I can’t wait forever!” There were nights he went to bed hungry. *Damn,* he’s hungry, right now. But, tray in hand, he can’t move. He’s immobilized, standing there once again on *Pause*. He’s stunned, confounded by what he sees. He’s staring at a huge red T-bone steak surrounded by a wreath of potatoes, corn, bread and butter, broccoli, jelly, a couple pieces of carrots and celery. *Christ almighty!* Don doesn’t know what to make of it.

“Want coffee, milk or Kool-aid?” coos the guard.

Something in Don snaps. “Fuck you, motherfucker!” accentuated with a digital gesture.

Right after the grate slams shut, he takes the tray and smashes it against the back wall. Picks it back up, turns and slashes at each wall with its steel edge. That done, he grabs a spoon and begins randomly but with intensity banging on the tray. *Blonk! Bing! Thwack! Thwack!* Nothing harmonious, but slowly increasing in energy as he hums louder and the clanging gets louder. Then suddenly he jerks to a full stop. Drops the tray on the floor. *Clunk!* Then starts to strip and tear his clothes. Fumbles at buttons, rips, whips off shirt and pants, BVDs and socks, he’s birthday naked. Once again he freezes, static in time and space, almost a Grecian alabaster.

Don does not want to accept anything, wants to resist everything. So he rejects the bed, chooses to lay on the floor, tasting its coldness, its harshness. He wants his body to feel deep pain, searches for whatever sensory punishment is possible. He grinds his shoulder into the concrete floor, tosses and moans. “*Three hundred days of indulgence are yours, My son, for suffering these most sacred pains. Suffer with the Crucified One! Save yourself from the pains of hell.”*

Don strikes blood, bruises bone and in this tomb he challenges all the minions of Divine Savagery to take him on. Attack him, fight him on territory he knows. He is desperate to escape Pastel Blue. Scarred, scratched, bruised, knuckles swollen from ramrodding the walls. Spit and piss and globs of slop all around, Don rolls and smears it all over his body. So adorned, so marked and tattooed, he finally approaches exhaustion.

Heart pounding, no breath left, he hugs the floor, wishing it could defy gravity and push up against him, crushing him to death. This wish unfilled, he hurls himself up, assumes the starting stance from his long-ago basketball training camps and begins furiously doing knee-to-chest pumps. *Faster, faster!* Now jumping jacks. *Faster, faster!* Push-ups. *Harder! Harder!* The spectators cheer; the cheerleaders are agape. Everyone’s deliriously yelling, “Faster! Harder! Harder! Faster!”

These frenzied words of chant, of incantation last unmarked minutes until he implodes into a heap of parts in the middle of Millston, FCI’s Segregation Unit.

From the *Visitor’s Guide*:

Our Segregation unit is considered to be among the most progressive examples of the Philosophy of Rehabilitation. Here at Millston we are not interested in causing pain. We deplore those old methods made so famous by Hollywood and Mr. Cagney. Here at Millston we pride ourselves on our Warden’s Philosophy of Normalcy. It is, in brief, our goal to situate the resident within an environment—a humane ecological niche, as we call it—where he has nothing to reject, dislike, rail against or revolt. We make it *nice* for him. As nice as home is. Or, at least, should be.

From outside the cell, the shift guard nudges the slide and peeks in. He has a front-row seat to Don’s antics. He knows this guy is a “CO,” as all Resisters are labeled in simple bureaucratese. He doesn’t know that CO stands for Conscientious Objector. He just knows that COs often end up in Segregation as this guy has, simply as a control measure. “*Protective Custody*. As much to help you adjust as to assist us in adjusting you.” The Warden wants to gauge the impact of Don’s presence on the population, especially the other twenty-odd war resisters. Not that, to him, Don is a special case. Just as a precaution. The President made it known down the chain that it’s time to turn the screws on these peacenik types. The Warden has long felt that he is over quota on screwballs. He doesn’t need this wacked-out radical preacher to become a catalyst for a riot.

What he watches Don do, the guard knows, will be valued by the Warden. “These guys really have problems.” That’s what he’ll tell his wife. “Dear, I can’t tell you some of the things they do. There was a new one in today and he went bonkers in Seg. I think we’d better remember him—and his unfortunate mom and dad—in our prayers, tonight.”

revised 10-24-1991 spell checked When the Corridor Captain gets the report, he decides to let Don sleep in his own slop and craziness. Without complaint, Don snores on the floor, bed unmade, only gobs of rejected dinner slumber upon it.

# Rung Stories

In 1972 I entered prison with the popular misperceptions which my white-male, middle-class, highly educated world held. I anticipated that the prison administration wanted to change my mind, re-educate me, and show me the errors of my way. Be penitent and ask for forgiveness—isn’t that why it’s called a *penitent*iary? Hardly. Rather what totally upended my world was their attempt to control my body, to eventually have me discern, identify with, and embrace my *subhuman* self. Slowly, over time, I adjusted but it was not caused by my intellectual consent, rather it occurred as I slowly descended down the rungs of the Shadow realm to the sector “where everything human is soon absent” and suffered a total personality break-down and transformation. In the “soon absent” sector I became one of them—a subhuman.

The Rung stories are“texts of terror.” Prison’s shadow realm has many sectors, including these three Rungs which take you to the first level, that of Organized Crime, gangs, and other *ad hoc* groupings that inmates join for protection. The second rung enters a sector where cruelty and pain thrive at the borders of the bureaucracy’s “standard operating procedure.” The third rung abandons you in the “soon absent” sector where darkness is so thick that it obscures one’s individuality, muffles one’s personal presence. These are vignettes I heard, and ones I’ve pieced together, or only found in pieces. As “prison” is, so I allege, still a fictional realm for most citizens, feel free to read these as fiction. (*Ha!*)

# Rung #1

## The Mafia and Me

An East Coast Mafia guy, who was taking a fall for a boss, walked with me several times trying to recruit me. He knew about and valued my intellectual and organizing talents but more he knew how reality worked. He schooled me, in his own way, as to the world of the Inside and the Shadow realm. I must admit that I was a bit like Columbus thinking that he was in China only to learn that the world was quite physically different than he had been taught and everyone he personally knew believed it to be. I’ll admit that I was tempted to explore his offer. We were talking before the dramatic shift caused by the release of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal took hold. These two events eventually caused a 180 degree shift in the popular attitude about the Vietnam War (most then calling for the troops to come home) and war Resisters (if the war was going to end, why keep them locked up?). So, realize that at the time I was still looking at five long years and felt the sting of what he was saying, mainly that my academic career was on the rocks and my relationship to the Catholic Church in the shitter. I’m not going to feign morality superiority because in truth I was simply too wiped out and still reeling from the “irrelevant and immaterial” episode so I just said maybe.

Using the Mafia as an example of outlaws who move easily between the human and subhuman dimensions might help you accept that there is another fully operational subhuman world existing right next to yours. But don’t be misled. The Mafia is just one denizen of the prison’s shadow realm, and not the most scary.

Most people know the Mafia as a nebulous international organization, a global enterprise—“Organized Crime.” As “organized” it maintains a legendary structured hierarchy with corporate memory and history. It’s organizational chart mirrors that of a standard corporation, however the executive and management titles differ—bosses, consigliere, soldiers, families, gangs, et al. In short, the Mafia is part of an underground “shadow economy” that basically moves products that are illegal and/or stolen and/or exploited. On its own terms, the Mafia has a corporate mission statement and code of ethics, even a code of social conduct (acts of deference, titles, etc.). More, it has you as a paying customer: “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.” In contrast, “unorganized” criminals wandered aimlessly committing random acts of senseless violence. Theirs is an absolutely amoral world.

From Hollywood most people know that the Mafia has ceremonial rituals. An initiate is confirmed as a “made man.” The movie The Godfather was probably as close to a documentary on the Mafia as most will see. In terms of influence on world affairs the Mafia’s reach remains incredibly extensive. I was shocked to hear, back then, that this extended into the Vatican and just about every government in the world. While the Mafia is usually associated with Italians, today there are no ethnic limitations to the franchise. Mafia more aptly describes a lifestyle, a value system, and a way of doing business.

You might think it an insult that I describe the Mafia as primarily a subhuman organization, but don’t. You’ll be missing the critical point, namely, that being subhuman is, in some sectors of the Shadow realm, a lifestyle grounded in a social structure and culture. The Mafia recruiter scoffed at my initial inability to see how close to my Sunlight world his Shadow realm was. I did relate that as a kid in Bayonne, New Jersey I remembered being told that “The Wops run the numbers racket.” He laughed, “I was just twelve. My first job.” He ran numbers on the streets at the same age that I was delivering the Bayonne Times door to door. Predictably, I kept responding with my one-body values arguing that living as a subhuman was not worthwhile. He laid it out clearly, “What do you want?” Then said, “You can have everything. Money, women, fame, revenge—what makes Francis X. tick?”

Since he had lived his whole life as a subhuman in the Shadow realm, as twice-bodied he moved fluidly between the world of humans and subhumans. In effect he told me that I had to let the scales fall from my eyes and wake up to the concrete reality of the Shadow realm, get a grip on who I was as a subhuman, and realize that I was never going to be allowed to bask in the Sunlight ever again. “Francis X., you’re a fucking criminal. Look around. Don’t those guards have guns? Don’t you get it? Capeesh?”

I mention this Mafia episode because I think that most folk recognize that the Mafia exists and that there is a criminal underworld. However, in many ways it is not a useful example. For all its shadowy doings the Mafia’s place is just inside the underworld, located quite near to where it abuts the legit, “normal” world. They are criminals and considered bad people but their lifestyle is not hard to grasp. They basically cheat, lie, steal, intimidate, and on bad days knock off some “competitors” or “accounts receivable” deadbeats. If you’re honest, there were times (right after watching *Goodfellas*?) that you probably thought that you could see yourself joining them, “If certain things had been different.” At the least you realized that “there but for the grace of God go I.” After all Mafia guys are mainly businessmen who are just a bit more into the shadow realm than you are comfortable with…but maybe not that uncomfortable, yes?

## Jesus freak

“There’s one in A and O.” He was saying his prayers, bible clutched. Why the fuck does the Warden keeps thinking I’m the messiah I just don’t know; but I go. Fair haired. Blue eyed. Could he be even twenty? I’m just assuming that he hasn’t been raped, not yet. “Jesus loves everyone. I can’t kill.” Aw shit! A fucking-A Jesus Freak. Just what we need here. But why should I give a damn? His fucking Jesus stuff drives the war machine. Chaplains in the field dealing out male body parts as divine food, strengthening the mad ass killers to be even more mad ass; divinely inspired. Why not feed him back to his own? “My wife’s at home with our ten month old.” Do I need to hear this fucking drivel? I hope someone’s reaming his wife. I can hear her moan. I wish I was reaming his wife. Probably seventeen, small town sweetheart, damn, I miss fucking pussy. Okay. Get a grip. “I’m gonna get you into dorm D. Just listen”—*Will this asshole listen?*—“Just listen to me. Get this right. You’re a “CO” in here. That’s us. War resisters. You’ll be protected.” He looks at me so oddly that I know he’s going to be hung in the meat locker. “I love Jesus,” fades into my ears and rummages around as I try to sleep; swat at it like a fly buzzing. Fucking-A, man, Jesus can’t save you once you’re here!

## Gangs

*I had to take a crap, real fast. Fuck off!* These guys lack words, just the eyes say it all, cruelty eyes. I took off to another dorm, relief! I just presume they’ll clean up the blood, dispose of that earlobe somewhere, have the Hacks come over and haul his sorry ass off to the infirmary. Gangs! Lucky for me they could give a rat’s ass about what I know. They peg me as a lily-livered white-boy scared out of his gourd, willing to suck cock to avoid pain. The other guy: lots of scars, matching his many tattoos. That’s what I find out: he had one too many tattoos, from some other gang. All said, their medicine man was one hell of a surgeon; just skinned him, didn’t nick bone or muscle. Earlobe specialist. Damn, gotta admire the talent.

## Russell

Russell was a con man. Not just a crook but a top talent—Broadway theater class performer. He was a Great Pretender, a real class act. I think he was more amused with me than really interested. He was crippling smart but not astute enough to know when he was stupid. So, every now and then, it seemed about every seven years, he falls and does some time. Imitated airline pilots, inventors, professors but he liked most to do a general, a real two or three star type, go in and fuck up some military operation. “Up in Grand Forks, I had those guys on red alert.” Christ, it was a nuclear silo! “How the hell did you pull that off?” He smiled a patented Cheshire Cat smile. Yeah, yeah, I was getting it; he was the Mad Hatter. Maybe he’s not so unlike me, maybe that’s what he likes, we were reckless, fucking stupid innocents charging at the Dragon or better Quixote at the windmill. Anyway we were having a good time. Ya know, like on the Outside. Coffee and chatting. Suddenly: “Don’t move asshole or we’ll pound the fucking shit out of you!” Quite hostile, but nothing too out of line. The Hacks have undying faith in the effectiveness of sounding tough; really doesn’t work. Three motherfuckers: If I had a gun I’d pop them like moving ducks in a sideshow gunnery booth. Win a prize if I nailed all three! “Let’s go.” They grab Russell, not inviting him to stand, these jerks never heeding Ann Landers’ sweet advice, and so up he goes, flies away, Bye, bye, Russell, never to be seen or heard from again. Someone said, “He pissed the Warden off with that piece in the inmate newsletter.” Newsletter got cancelled. Just another day Inside. Guys come, guys go; living or dead; dead or alive. *Bye, bye Russell!*

## Crocker

There was not a thing to like about Crocker. Physically a runt, wizened, with hair that grew in tufts on top his head, across his face, pimples, beady eyes, fuck, I can’t find words to fit his ugliness. To boot he was a world class asshole. Projectiles kept launching from his missing teeth that served as bomb-bays for spittle and shrapnel sprays of food tidbits whenever he was eating or laughing, although more often he was cursing up a storm and sprinkling all about with incendiary words: *fuckin’ niggers* and *fuckin’ injuns* and *fuckin’ fags* was his trinity of choice. Truly a piece of human shit. I mean if they had an out-of-box-failure that could be returned for a replacement, I’d lick the stamps myself. Yeah holy moly altar boy me, because he was fucking talking me to death. Yadda, yadda, he had a trap that never shut. Just my luck getting tagged by the Chaplain to tug my little Sermon on the Mount heart over and befriend this fuck-up. Crocker made me violate one of my own religious absolutes and wish that his mother had aborted.

He spoke such poor drop-out English that I could never imitate him properly. At times this was a relief because I wasn’t sure that I always wanted to know what he was ranting about. But the little fucker was so far down the Shadow rabbit hole that maybe he came out the other side and I really missed my chance to kiss the son of God’s ass. I don’t know. Just listen.

“He came in every morning and woke me up by fondling my dick. I kinda liked it. He’d get me stirring and then he’d kiss my dinger all over and lick me till I was wide awake. Most times he played with himself but now and then I’d blow him. I thought that all daddies were like him.”

“Foster poppa Jack, now’s here’s a fucking real man. The old fart would come home drunk and beat me, no matter what, no matter why. I was round ten and such a small shit that I could squeeze behind something heavy like his dresser and he couldn’t reach me. Look here, these three slash scars. He got to me. …Yeah, still waiting to fuck up the ole coot.”

“Ha. Ha. When my balls were bursting I’d mess with my little sisters, not really sisters, I’m no pervert, we’re all foster trash. I knew some had been getting the rod for years. I liked it when they fought back—I’d slap ‘em around. Eat me, bitch! Goddam I luv those whiney leetle whores.”

“Think, I’m no dope. Got my GED in juvie, my seventh, errr, maybe eighth time down. Started lifting weights but fucking queers kept wanting to feel my muscles. I ain’t no queer, man. Had to do that now and then, ya know how it goes, just no queer. Don’t think me no queer!”

“Why did you steal? I mean again. Doesn’t doing time frighten you?”

“Nuttin’ scare me.”

Crocker was on a roll, talking about this theft and that heist, about getting burned by other thugs, and brushed off the getting “scared straight” stuff like it was lint. “It’s good in here.” That came out of nowhere. “Good?” He got real steady, somewhat calm, like about to give a little speech. I almost thought he was organizing his thoughts, but I doubted that. “Learned me how to do it in ‘ere.” I was not sure of his reference point. He blew out a big wad of spit and of course sprayed my shirt and pants a bit; dew drops. “Har, har. Ya don’t know how to do it, do ya?” We didn’t talk after that—he actually shut his trap and just well, fuck, just smirked, I guess.

“Crocker’s turning down the last dime on a quarter for weapons possession.” A guard tells me that. He knows more, but wasn’t letting on. I had to ask a trustee who knew everything, took a pack of cigs to satisfy my curiosity. “Poison.” Just the one word and he thought it enough, but hey, I’m a fucking dumbass Inside virgin. He dangles some more: “Can’t catch him. No one can. Smart little fucker, if I don’t say so meself.” My eyes tell him I’m still stupid. “Yar one of those COs, right?” I nod. “Like nonviolence, do yar?” I nod again. “Hee, hee, he’s one of yars!” I’m totally not getting it. “Look man,” and I stop, slip him another pack, “what did he do?”

The trustee takes his coffee mug and runs a finger around its edge. “The kiss of death.” That’s all he says. Okay. I’m getting nowhere. Later when I rap it down around the mess hall table another guy mockingly wags his head and snickers. I’m getting real pissed: “Goddam it, what the fuck’s up, man? What the fuck?” Jasper holds up his coffee cup just like the trustee had. “The Foster Home Serial Killer. You really didn’t know?” I frown, scrunch up my cheeks. Someone have mercy on me! “Man, sometimes you can’t see the motherfucking forest for the cocksucking trees. That’s his Inside rep. That little shit probably poisoned a hundred foster parents. He’s an Avenger. Clever. Smarter than smart. Not sure if this is true, some guy who did a nickel in max with him testified—I mean he swore on his mother’s grave—that Crocker’s an A-fucking genius, some kind of mystical chemist. Could be bullshit. But you just gotta dig it, man, just dig it!”

# Rung #2

## Sr. Celeste

Sister Agnes Celeste had mentored me, so my assistance during ceremonial preparations for Mass was prized. She was a stickler for details. The words mistake or oversight or “Sorry!” were not in her vocabulary. From her no absolution, no second chances. There was the Celeste Way, no other. I mastered the one and only way to fold and unfold an alb. Likewise, holding the cincture just so that Father could do a simple twirl and be bound. Stoles were hung wrinkleless as were chasubles, with all other accoutrements of priestly primp and preen set in their proper places. If a Monsignor was to officiate: his biretta and proper trim colors. A bishop—now there was a clothes horse if ever I met one!—with miter and rings, pectoral crosses and skull caps, his distinctive crosier—Shepherd’s staff—plus His Excellency-only special editions of Scripture, gilded and bejeweled; it went on. Artful dressing and then the mastery of protocol. I was at first too young to know about Broadway theater but later did not doubt for a moment when someone whispered that the holy Sister had been in “showbiz”—the word uttered with an odor of un-sanctity tinged with an air of envious tittering.

“Shoes off!” I obey. Glossy blacks. Visiting room pretty.

“Shirts off!” I obey. Khaki standard and undershirt tee.

“Pants off!” I obey. Belt unsnapped, gravity assures a graceful fall. I bend to my ankles, remove one leg, then the other, just toss my pants to the side.

“All!” I had already obeyed. Not tardy. Not shy. There are no second chances, I hear Sister’s echoing dictum.

“Lift!” I obey. Two fingers spread in a vee. Left hand pulls my fleshy penile self to salute as my other fingers toggle my balls. Scrotum cleared! did not have to be shouted.

“Mouth!” I obey. Two fingers, one from each hand, grapple the edges and pull wide. *Open wide!* is only said in dental offices, here it is more than wide—“cavernous” approaches the inspector’s intent—making sure that no contraband is being smuggled out, no murderous blades wrapped like metallic braces around teeth, no telltale string that connects to something hideous hanging down my esophagus.

“Hair!” I obey. Fingertips like bomb detectors scanning my skull, back and forth, up and down, messing my hair is not the concern. Without mention, ear lobes are pulled exposing the smaller coves of smuggler’s delight.

“Bend!” I obey. Pivot 180 degrees. Slight spreading of legs. Bow at half-waist. Ready!

“Spread!” I obey. A handful of each buttock cheek. A slight, delicate, somewhat demur exposure, revealing the treasure he has come this day to claim as his own. Ah, truly my pleasure is beyond magnificent. I am his! I am beheld as only he can behold me. I am known as only he can know me, in the full biblical meaning of the word!

*Sssshhhh! Putt! Putt! Putt! Whooooshh!* In unison the war resisters *Resist!*

“Goddam hippie motherfuckers! Perverts!” red-faced, banging his baton against the radiator, full-bodied bucking back and forth like a chained bull…anger, humiliation. Kill the gook bastards!

We start dressing, slowly: convict protocol. He’s the one cornered now; can’t leave us unguarded. “Hey, Anderson, what do you tell your wife each night about these little love fests?”

As soon as he can the Hack unlocks the door, steps out into the Visiting Room: stands rigid and authoritative, a sentry eyeballing everyone, targeting someone to fuck over. Without a doubt, Anderson will exact his revenge by fucking-over someone’s momma or kid.

We enter the room: *Bitches strutting our stuff!*

## Slap da Bitch!

First coffee break. Sitting with four guys, all non-COs or dopers, being entertained by a story of daring-do and “Slap da Bitch!” These java-raps are a script that any hard-core Hollywood screenwriter would die for. What most film hacks yearn to create with their imagination, these guys spit out in between smokes. The horror, though, is that these fellows do what the others only half-erectly fantasize. When the trigger is pulled, these boys are the finger. They laughingly lick blood from their moustaches.

#1: “Fuck the bitch!” and all the “Roll ‘em over and groove the tube!” ringside cheers scramble through his mind as she comes atop. He wants to grab her by the throat (maybe her titties) and yank her down. “Ouch, that hurts! Stop! Stop!” But he doesn’t stop. He throws her, slams her hard onto her back and slaps her, slaps her like every bitch needs slapping when they want to ride high and play The Man, slaps her and spits, “BITCH!”—conveying in that one exhaust of breath the ageless condemnation, the exhalation of Yahweh’s expulsion from the Garden: “BITCH!” Oh, the word fits so well, draws the cheeks into gullies of bitterness, a word which spittle easily accompanies, for what are they but to be spit upon, beaten and rammed with the rod? “Spare the rod and spoil the child!”

#2: “Man, I’se finds me parole officer humping me squeeze, I mean, boat buck nak’it ‘n gittin it on in me apartmant. Now, Man, dat’s bold ef ever I don’t say so’s ..."

He enacts the smart whip of his gun right up to the victim’s nose.

“... so’s I’se takes tis guy’s badge ‘n I pins ‘is dick to ‘is trowsars, Jeeeesus of Christ, don’ts he yells ‘n hollars! ... Tells me he’s gonna bust me far the forever ... ‘n my bitch she’s gits so far-fucking rowtated by my punchin’ this lettle puke away, she curls ‘round mes leg ‘n start moanin’ far me, so’s ..."

He artfully pauses for a swipe of the black juice because he knows he’s on a roll.

“Eenspired!” Continues: “... so’s I grabs ‘er by da chin—lek this,” he motions, showing his gentle cuddling of her face with his free hand, “’ns I kneels ‘er down gitting’ ‘er hot fer me cock ‘n ten, “BAAAP!” I knocks ‘er out wid me knee!” He slaps his left knee, the instrument of deliverance, and the others in chorus slap at their chairs and bonk! and thunk! their cups: acts of kudos. The moral of the story is quickly run out, “Dat’s shews tat bitch ‘n eeny bitch taw fuck wid me!... I’m Da Man!”

It was like preaching to the converted. They went ecstatic participating in the act of symbolic sacrifice of “Slap That Bitch!” They re-re-live, truly resuscitate themselves as they seize a moment of transcendental relief through his bold actions.

#3: “Man,” another chimes in, “I once wasted a bitch once for ev’n thinking ‘bout doing thet!” More laughter and rattling cups.

#4: As it escalates, “Yeh, Man, led me tell ya, et’s beter ef yuv cuts ‘em up, den dey can’t do et wid nobudy, nevar agin. Deys ‘ave ta beg fer et!”

The air thickens, What else beside blood and cunt? Every con has his own humping fantasies. But the jive isn’t over yet. The first speaker has waited to end the break with a thrilling flourish.

#1 (again): “Tens I walks out. Bud I gits a bright un up ‘ear,” he taps his left temple, “Bad Dude, gives ‘er whats she wants. Be’s Meester Nice Guy! So’s I goes back en, she’s as conked as a mudderfuckin’ rock ‘n I flips ‘er butt-beauty ups tha bed, rips ...” and he demonstrates his strength by tearing her imaginary panties as he would a simple piece of paper, “rips er panties ‘n fucks ‘er ass so’s hard tats I cums five times ... Man, I’se swear—by me Mudder's Kiss—maybes sex times!”

They laugh and slap and howl and curse; cups rattle and eyes bulge in awe and amazement.

*Shadow truth*: Of the small pleasures of life, one’s cruelties, when drawn on a broad canvas, seem to evoke a bonding between so many.

Whistle blows: Hack batons bang randomly on walls, radiators, doorframes, rounding up the herd: “Break time’s over! Move it! Lock up and count!”

## Mafia Sal

Mafia Sal was a reliable font of knowledge. “Jones” he nods towards the guy just crossing our path, “he’s untouchable.” Wow, that resolved the stupid ass discussion we COs were having. Like, can you believe it, you run out of topics to discuss while Inside? No joke. This Jones, or whatever his name might really be, was a wise-ass, loud-talking, “nigger, spick, dago, injun” cursing guy who when he stood up during the weekly movie and told whoever was mouthing off to shut the fuck up, Christ, they did. In my mind I first thought he was suicidal. That he was a fucking screwball whose nuts would be lying in the sink next morning. “He has his own cell.” Not so much a big deal until I learned that he was down for just a nickel. There were few single cells in the Stone and the rule was that you had to have done a dime already just to get on the waiting list—no one ever wants to sleep in the dorms. But here was Jones, the stupidest motherfucker in the whole joint. Sassing guards. Ragging on inmates. Cursing and swearing and…hell, he was all of five foot ten standing on his toes, wire rimmed glasses, crew cut, and a fucking wimp: pimples were bigger than his muscles.

Mafia Sal: “He did a job for the warden.”

No. No. No.nonononono!

“You’re just screwing with my mind, right, man?”

Smirks as he toys with me: “Stregner’s been the warden’s groom for a long time. He’s seen the tongue.”

Was this a story I wanted to hear? And if hearing it what was I supposed to do with it? Did I want to know that Jones’s nickname was “Butcher”? “He just doesn’t kill his deer. He skins them. Guts them. Dries out and makes treasured items.” I guess I just looked too dumbfuck altar boy or whatnot: “I told him, when you’re out I got a cock I’d like to hang in my den.”

*Sal!*

## Max

Captor of Captive Self: Another resister who did protest and organize while Inside got sent on The Ride, a continuous moving from jail to prison to jail through several states. That way no one knew where he was. This was the pre-computer age, and there were no cell phones in the cars or anywhere. His story stayed with me for a long time as a perplexing tale until I found myself as my own Captor. Max is the convict. Steve Witson is the Hack and an FBI agent. They’re in the Marion federal penitentiary, Illinois; a maximum lock-up.

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Within fifteen minutes, Agent Witson has set the stage, dragged his transfer package—radical revolutionary Max Jennings—through “Costume and Make-up” where he has him put on a Hack’s uniform! (What the motherfuck now?) Dressed, Witson signals Control to roll back the gate to Cell Block D on B Wing. Without a mirror, Max can’t gauge how the audience sees him. He still feels like the hobbling convict, chained and linked from hands to feet, a transfer shuffling behind his Keeper. Yet something inside shouts, Do it! … and so he does.

What Max doesn’t see is himself as Hack—as that image of ambulatory authority, instant executioner, existential judge and jury. More astounding, he’s an icon. The uniform draws out the savagery of his Celtic and Teutonic genes. It’s a cloth of transformation. Steve notes, *Great!* He looks...a nip of jealousy, envy, a touch of a lack of self-worth cuts the sentence short.

Max: Tall, broad-shoulder muscular, with a left cheek that bears a telling battle slash scar. Armed to the teeth: pistol, cuffs, blackjack, and “the bat,” that cross between a baton and whip, the bastard son of modern chemistry, a plastic composition which, in creative hands, can bludgeon or whip— “plastic steel.”

What follows is Marion Penitentiary as a Disney attraction, “Prisonland.” Steve tows Max and barks like a tour guide. Max is amused, disconnected in a way, sort of observing himself from above, floating, not really in his body. Through the Inside magic of the moment Max is securely tethered. Steve’s the slave master bringing his Northern abolitionist cousin onto the plantation. It’s all attraction/repulsion, approach/avoidance but, at the bottom, a pure validation of cruelty. Max doesn’t revolt. He is now a god of cruelty.

“Hey, nigger boy, Old Tom there, quit playing with yourself and get over here,” Steve commands a barely awake elderly black convict. He’s rattling, clanging the bars with his bat. The old man walks over, not cursing, not hurling obscenities, just quietly; he places his hands on the bars.

“Yasser.”

“How long you been in here, Tom?”

“Twenty-five, sir.”

“Have you learned anything, Tom?”

“Yasser.”

“Tell me, old nigger.”

“I’se learned not to mess with The Man.”

This the old con says with steady fire, with a peculiar dignity. It’s as if the sentence sums up his caginess, all his street smarts. Conveys why he’s alive and still pulling time. But more, it’s a statement of his history, his grounding in his own story, a connection to his people, time and—although it escapes Max at this moment—his God.

stretches his right hand through the bars and pats the old man on the head. Not with the vigor that one tousles a boy’s hair but with the same intent.

“Good, Tom, you can go back, now.”

“Yasser.”

Without comment or question, the two move along. Steve picks up the pace, quickening, as if sensing his quarry.

“Are you two fag breaths licking each other’s assholes again?” Steve fearlessly presses his face between the steel bars as he raucously laughs at two overly-tattooed guys. Max notes they’re adorned with Hell’s Angels and White Power symbols and slogans. The two inmates bound over to him, a kiss away from his face. “Ya la’tel shetface, puke ass cocksucka, ya ain’t man ’nuf tu open thes cage en fight me lake a man!”

It’s clear that they’ve met before. “Your schlong must be ten feet tall by now, cranking it like you do. Here,” and Steve makes as if pulling something from his shirt pocket, “here’s some pussy perfume. Go bang the toilet, fag breath.”

Why the inmates don’t rip Steve’s eyes out is beyond Max. Who is Steve? What’s his real story? Unspoken, these are not questions to break the spell. Performance over, Steve is now several steps ahead of Max. Behind him, all Max hears is horse laughter. He doesn’t look back. He’s jogging to catch up. If he had looked, he’d have seen a con, arm hanging out the cell, pumping a finger of fuck you! as the scene closer.

Steve and Max quickly pass through several cell block gates and arrive at what is obviously Segregation. Here there are true torture holes. Solitary isolation:7/24/365. It’s near pitch dark, and many uncountable ethereal creatures are present. The smell of the site—phew!—weakens Max. His knees quiver imperceptibly, like when he walked in procession into the cemetery shouldering Dad’s coffin.

“This one’s yours,” Steve says as if they’ve been keeping score and Max’s been complaining about not enough times at the plate.

“What?”

Instead of answering, Steve firmly shoves him inside a cell. Max’s facing a wall of darkness. For a suspended moment he just stands there—“hung out” as the lingo goes. *Vulnerable*.

Suddenly he is vigorously and harshly shoved backwards, body-slamming Steve who’s standing right behind him against the doorframe, as a threatening voice snarls, “Ya muthafuckers stay outta my face!”

It’s a voice that could kill—its tone has a shiv’s slicing edge. Again, Steve shoves Max forward and this time, somewhat adjusted to the dank darkness, he staggers to a standstill in front of a large black youth. The guy’s not as tall as him but wider, sculpted like a Nubian Adonis. His bare sweaty chest glistens as if he’d just been doing push-ups. *A keg of rage!*

The con swings at Max, batting down his raised left arm. The force of the blow pitches Max off-balance. He awkwardly hops and half-jumps a step backwards. He fires a bewildered glance at Steve who’s leaning against the cell grate, at rest in an observer’s pose, arms folded, almost like a professor—only lacking a smoking pipe!

“Hey, man, cool it, shit, I’m friendly…” But the guy knows all types of cop talk and takes this bullshit jive as a trap. He jumps Max, moves expertly with gang trained battle skills, locks his neck, a death choke. Stunned, not prepared in the least for this—not thinking that this is what Steve meant by “Being a Hack for a day, take a trip to my side!”

Before Max even taps into his fear he feels his windpipe being crushed, can’t draw in any air, claws at the guy’s hands, wrists, desperately trying to loosen the grip as everything abruptly turns dark and fuzzy…overpowered, freaked, fearing death…conks out.

“Aw, Christ Almighty!” Max doesn’t hear as Steve comes to the rescue. He flies from the guy’s blind side and with a few expertly placed karate chops lays him out. The guy’s sprawled out, ass up on the floor, partly on top of Max.

In a vale of semi-consciousness, Max starts writhing, gasping for air. He’s smothered by a weight of blackness, deafened by screaming shooting stars of silver pain and red-hot blood comets, and drowning in black sweat. Steve hefts and heaves the inmate with his right foot, rolls him off Max. Then, without even asking if Max’s okay he glowers and chastises, “Are you totally insane?” Sternly, before the question’s fully heard, Steve answers himself, “Good God, you’re a fool!”

For several minutes, the scene is a diorama. No one moves. Then, as if the final bell has rung—9…10!—Max catapults up, heaved by some alien force. He’s standing tall and pumping his chest with rage. Without intent, he stands menacingly over Steve, the Short.

“You’re the fool! You walked me into this blind. What the motherfuck did you think I was going to do? Shit. Walk in here and beat the crap out of him?”

“He’s black.”

“What the fuck?”

“Can’t figure it out?” Steve abruptly turns and starts to whack the back of the unconscious youth with his bat.

Max forcefully grabs Steve’s baton, lifts and heaves him away from the body.

Steve taunts, “Do it! Show me you have some balls!”

Although more than a bit bewildered and off his mark, Max intentionally flicks a symbolic bat whack at Steve. Unexpectedly, it snaps the tip of his nose, blood flies, a soft crush! and several whimpers and Agent Witson crumples into unconsciousness.

Steve’s slumped body—a heap of powerlessness.

*At the ready, sir! A fiery match? A kick to the head? Perhaps a blow to the groin?* It’s

“A Little brother’s revenge”: a story about Max, the third son. His scrawny body he’s worked so hard to build up—willed it to grow tall and taller! A hundred push-ups, a hundred pull-ups, a hundred sit-ups, a five-mile run every day, every week, every year—his own boot camp regimen. Max enters the novitiate. Every evening dragging himself, kneecaps scraping every inch around the perimeter of the chapel: thirteen Stations of the Cross. Scourging. Tears of blood. Hammer and nails torturing out the weakness.

Max hears the mythic invitation. Every male seed hears it: *Revenge is redemption!* Be a man, son. Don’t cry! Yes! Max feels in his clenched biceps the urging of all who have done it. “In His Name!” “God wills it!” All who have sought validation through this one redemptive act, hidden in the abode of the powerless, here, within the cloaca of the penitentiary.

Who’ll know? It’s not an FBI trap. No one’s filming this escapade. He’s obscured by Seg’s intestinal darkness. Who would be the wiser? Who would come forth to testify?

From out of the Hole—truly the sphincter of life—Max excretes the black youth, not in body but in soul. Hack talk: *You’re just a piece of shit!* He whacks him again and again. Strike, blow, lash, whop, smite! There’s a pleasure registering on a scale measuring historical pain. Max becomes giddy at the *thud! thump! crack!* jolt of the body. *Rise up, my son, for today you are a man!* Profound moral and physical release and relief spurts from him as he watches the whites of his victim’s black eyes roll around, deliriously. *Max is dead! Long live King Max!*

The gods of cruelty are well pleased.

Groaning awake, Steve is half up, grasps his knee; blood crawls from his nose. Max picks him up, literally hoists him with both of his hands, clawing his chest, and brings him lip to lip. “You’re just a piece of shit,” he says dismissively as if intoning the Mass’s “Ite missa est!”

Max places Steve, carefully and gently, just outside the door of the Hole, sets him there as calmly as if taking out Thursday’s trash. As he turns and shuts the cell door, he pauses a second—Flash!—Max instantly flips back and his role as Hack is soon forgotten.

Tears flood Max’s eyes, tears boil with rage and fury at Steve’s brutal beating of this helpless black guy. *Why did Steve beat that guy senseless?* Max raises his hand in blessing, strokes the air with a sign of the Cross, whispers a kind, loving, priestly, “God help you, my son!”

Rung #3—“where everything human is soon absent”

In the “absent” sector there is no individuality. Everyone is Other, and so each other. Each and all share an intimacy of darkness, abandonment, and betrayal. It is the Shadow sector where the personal can only be expressed through a mythic story or storyline.

## Cigarettes

For a package of cigarettes you obtain entrance into the darker sectors. Who cares if flesh is sold as long as pleasure is secured? What is living but the gush of the primal stream of hunger that tears at anything consumable? So it is “her” ready for you after lights out. Draped blankets provide a wink of dignity for your savagery, and it is your howling lust that is now your mistress. Does it really matter if she is willing or not? Just suppose it to be a battlefield and she our winsome captive, the whore of the enemy, what else is to be done? Does it really, truly matter if it is an asshole or a pussy tightly sucking you with fear as enticement? Her eyes are sweet, as doe-like as any you can remember, and her skin so soft, more soft than you can remember. “I can give you head better than any woman” was the come on in the shower stall. Now it is all on and come. The bed rocks, my hard cock rips and saws, I spit and smack her, lift her behind and pound her intent upon breaking her bones, she is mine, bought, sold, no holds barred. I pound her again, aware of the extra charge for blood, I grab her hair and pull her head backwards, she whimpers, artful is she, I freak out into a bludgeoning rage, egged on by those waiting in line, whacking fucking creaming; she lies still like death. The blood costs me another pack.

“Kill?”

Ask me again. Go on. Did I really kill someone? Not just someone, Matthews the fucking Hack. I know his name. I taste his name as I bite my tongue and swallow blood. He’s just one of those “I was following orders” type of cruel sons-of-bitches. I mean he was nice. He’d sit and talk with a guy. I even saw him read a con’s letter once; another fucking illiterate. That’s just it, I mean, I’m sure he explains it all to his wife. How he cares for the cons. How he hopes they leave and never return. How he holds them in his prayers each night. *Fuck!* I learned how to turn a fork into a small pitchfork; tines sharp as glass. *Yeah, I didn’t flinch*. When the moment came I walked right up, staring him straight in the eyes, and plunged that shiv right into his “I love you Daddy!” fucking heart. Why not? Wasn’t my crusade to root out evil? And what better way to fight evil than with evil? I mean, do you really want me to value the Hack as a person and the Captive as a piece of shit? Bet your polka dot drawers you do. You’re a fucking asshole. I bet you’d fit right into his shoes, go around acting like you’re Jesus the Christ or whatnot, so in love with your own fucking evil that you call yourself a “Just man!” *Asshole*. It was me who was just following orders: Yahweh thundering, “Guard Eden’s gate. Kill them if they try to return.” Fucking-A, man, my sword is all aflame!

## VN rape

We dragged all the women into a hut. Not bad cunt. But only the young ones. After twenty they all go to pot; stink. Some little boys. *Who cares?* A cock sucking mouth is a cock sucking mouth. I tell you, uppers really help. Hee, hee. Did you ever put heroin on your dick? Dig it, man, you can fuck all night. This bitch was deep-throating me forever and I pounded more sweet ass than I can remember. What? Sure. It’s true, man. Sure, sure, it happens. Some guys just can’t handle it. The spurting pleasure flips them out, like a live hand grenade they just blow. I’ve heard about it; never seen it. Cock rockets off and their sperm just explodes, man. Kinda cool, in a way. Dig it! But what’s one more corpse in the Nam, man? Body-bags everywhere. You gotta deal with the shit, that’s righteous. If it ain’t our dicks piled high in the bush then it has to be theirs. But don’t dwell on the negatives, man. Take a hit. Best shit in the Stone, man. *Listen up*: You do what you gotta do, that’s truth. Kill them however you can, man. Them are da orders! Hee, hee. Suck on that!

## First time

You return from your first ass fuck. You are a normal guy, a regular dude. They watched you power your way on the basketball court. You B-ball fucked the asshole niggers. You were the white god. You took the dark skins on your back and shook them off like a giggle. You laid them out on the ground and looking down you didn’t have to say a word, you were The Master, nothing less. Your compadres, anyone who wasn’t black, sat in the stands and cheered you on. They laid bets. They didn’t care if your cock was 9 inches or 11, they just knew that as you bucked into them, threw them off their nigger ways, well, you were their hero. Whiteman beating the blacks at their game, roundball being the ghetto’s rite of passage. No doubt they plotted nightly revenge; wanted someone to stick a shiv into your groin. But you fucked them on and off the court. Big ass howling black bitches, two cartons of cigarettes and they’d sucked your nuts harder than they did their momma’s tits. God, the thrill is beyond ecstatic! So what am I to say to proper white society from which I come but “come” motherfucker, suck my cock and live like you’ve never live before! Ha. Trust me, my cum is magical!

## Visitor’s room

What was the most horrid cruelty in the deepest sector of the Shadow realm? Sexual violence? Torture? Personal humiliation? Hardly. *Visitor’s Room*: punishing my family. They are not digitized so they expect civility. Once the barred entry gate thudded shut my oldest brother trembled. He was gripped by dreadful fear. My mother who had given birth to nine children was now eye-savaged by the admitting Hack as a scum-bag, bitch, whore! She was ordered: “One hug and kiss when you meet. One when you leave.” So when Mom places her hand upon my knee, motherfucking Hack Matthews following orders perfectly, strides over and booms: “Stop it!” She near jumps out of her skin, off the Earth, and bent her neck in obeisance. Mom: slave of the State. Fuck!

I can’t bear it! “Everyone please leave,” I mutter unintelligibly. (They stay for the whole two hours allotted.)

Families: rattling heartfelt chains as children run around, playing in the pools of psychic blood, disobeying adult calls to behave—“Be good!”—but only quieted by vending machine candy. Con-kids: Living assurance to the Hacks that they have job security, these, their future inmates.

Me, unable to answer the simplest of questions: How are you? How are things going in here? What have you been reading? Have you heard from your cousin Ethel? So it goes. Me, mute; no tongue. Babbling, yes. Arranging vocal sounds one after the other. But all I’m doing is passing time. Why are you here? I want to ask, but I can’t even form the question. Francis is no longer here, I want to say. Do you like my number? It’s a good cribbage hand: 8867. Ha. But I don’t laugh. No one’s laughing. No one can hear the sounds of silence.

Hate myself

…hate you

…hate myself

….curse my mother for birthing me

…slit the Old Man’s throat, stupid ass motherfucker!

…this is the red button. Push it and the world ends. Click!

…god hath spoken: every child a murderer: push my hand up her cunt and ripped out her tubes. Peace, man!

…slice and dice! Circumcised dicks rule!

…take a hammer to her head or use a gun-butt: old witch’s lived too long anyways, one gook’s just another gook. I don’t care if she is your momma!

… “Bless me fadder for I’se sinned,” cumming up his penitential asshole, “Te absolvo!”

…they hung him on a cross, do you really think they put a diaper on him? Nuts hanging down; cock sliced off. Hey, these are phallic warriors; god’s dickheads. Dig it, man!

…sell me your leetle children! worms dripping out my mouth. Five dollars for ya sester. A plenary indulgence granted, I intone. Wanna see some ears? My cock’s so hard I can’t stand up so I toss them over; teak box, inlaid ivory. He sniffs the box’s rim, wafting in the odor of fetid rotting flesh. Sign here, Uncle Sam thanks you.

…I am never going to die. The dark never dies. Only the light fades and dies; extinguishes. I am forever. Beyond forever, beyond now, beyond the beyond. Into me all comes and is consumed, extinguished, laid to rest, expires. I am never going to die. I crawl out from between your legs, cock and pussy pad, cry: *Wah, wah!* Which means, watch out I’m gonna fuck yer mudder and ass whip your daddy. I am never going to die. I love to watch the fire dim and fade away in their sweet eyes. My hands cherish the moment of stopping a breath. I lean over and kiss their lips. Before she’s cold I’ll fuck her just one more time. Before he’s cold, same. Who’s gonna stop me? *I am never going to die, you fool.*

## Cock mouth

You take a cock in the mouth. At first you struggle. But then you accept it. It’s just a rod. Yeah, using your mouth like a soft hand, jerking him off. What the fuck do I care? Maybe if I jack him off and offer him a mouthful of his miraculous cum, he’ll back off? Sure, the safest way to go. So what is a cock in the mouth? Or up the asshole? Come on, what’s your hang-up? Chug down some Jack Daniels or toke some good weed and I mean, man, it’s all just come and cum and come again. Nothing messy. You can swallow or just spit it out, he really doesn’t give a fucking goddam. So, Suck it down, bitch!

## Backdoor man

Yeah, it takes a bit of learning, this how to open your asshole. Not everyone is kind—brings some Vaseline. They just try to poke it in without working the sphincter. Jesus, that hurts, but it’s not a shiv across your throat, plus your pimp’s there to protect you. Let’s praise pimps! Yeah, man, I mean that. How many bitches do you think would be sucking sod if their pimps were not so bold? My pimp has cut more than one asshole; and never asked me to deep throat him, which I mean I’d do at a moment’s notice. I mean, I love my pimp. But let’s get back to it: Your asshole needs some training. Some gardening, so to speak. A bit of seeding, here a finger highly Vaselined, one working you so that your sphincter expands. Then weeks on the rubber ball, duct taped to your back door so that every day you’re exercising your portal of acceptance. Look, just get used to it, some guys are fucking assholes and other guys are just fucking the assholes. That just what doing time Inside is all about. *Ooomph!*

## Whiteboys

Look asshole, you think you’re some kinda hero. I heard your blather about the Nam and how you fucked them with bullets and bombs and your own hard dick, but look motherfucker you’re just some half-assed stupid motherfucker from some suburb of St. Paul whose taken a job as a Hack and thinks that it makes you some motherfucking god, one able to dish out fate, to call the shots on living and dying. But let me tell you, we all laugh at you. You’re a pathetic dumbass white honkey who has no idea how the Big Boys have manipulated you. You thought that enlisting meant that you were some type of savior of mankind. Fuck, they brainwashed you so quickly that you were sucking their Big Cocks before you realized that you were just a Big Piece of Shit to them. So now you carry the wounds. Tell me about the shrapnel in your thigh but, Rambo, don’t ask me to pity you, asshole!

Look, man, you were just fucked up then and now you’re just being fucked up again. A Hack instead of Sergeant So-and-So. Jesus of the motherfucking Christ, when will you wake up?

## Snitch

Should I tell you what it’s like to get six inches of cock up your asshole, *unrequested?* I mean, do you know what’s it’s like to watch three motherfuckers unleash their ding-dongs and know they mean for you to pleasure them, suck them off, let them dig deep into your ass alley and hear them groan and shriek, “You’re one motherfucking great piece of ass!” I mean, in the morning I can strut my stuff. These ass pounder will tell others and they will line up. Man, I mean I will get anything I want. If I want *Cutty Sark*, fucking-A it is there. If I want my own little boy, shit, he’s there licking my balls. I mean, when you are one good piece of ass, everything is yours. Look, man, I was prepared in the seminary. I learned well that my body was the birthing body. Males rule the world! So fucking-A, why wouldn’t they love me? Lust for me? Beat each other over the head to get first in line? Jesus of the Christ, I am magnificent. Once you’ve tasted my innocence, my purity, my acceptance of all your most violent of violences, fuck, then you know. In my ass is redemption. I take all that is male upon me. I worship all that Jesus came to save. I am the kosmic fuck. So, stand in line…and be redeemed!

## Freak, again

He’d been a week on the fuck line. I mean, I tried to save the Jesus Freak but he refused to call upon us COs as his savior. He expected Jesus to arrive, somehow, on a beam of light or something weird like that and intervene, cut off the dicks of his attackers. But it doesn’t go down like that, and I don’t mind taking my place, maybe number 111, that’s okay with me. He’s soft and very yielding when I come in him. A sweet murmur like the first woman I ever fucked. Christ, he’ll be on the line for years to come. I’ll be back, you can bet on that!

## Guardian angels

The Hacks had a pool. Nothing is secret Inside. They wanted to fuck my ass. They were outraged that I went out and taught school with their wives. They knew, as I did, that I was ravaging their wives while they were working. I pussy-licked all their wives and girlfriends. There wasn’t a rack of tits that I didn’t stroke and pet on my way to my classroom. At lunchtime, I lifted all their skirts and inserted my savage outlaw cock into their unsatisfied pussies. It didn’t take a Zen master to know that these women were never properly fucked. They were all unfulfilled goddesses, yearning for a wild ass Pan of a man to pipe them into ecstasy. Ha. I molested them all. I left none untouched. Not the ugly or fat or Scandinavian rejects. Full-bodied northern bitches who in another time were cherished goddesses. No chance for them in this skinny age. So I looked at them and sucked them inside me. Took them back to my dorm cot and masturbated them into goddess-hood. Ain’t I just some fucking-A kosmic stud. *Better believe it!*

## Freak! (3)

Even I knew that he was dead meat. This Jesus Freak, again. I tried, believe me I did. I told him to claim that he was a CO and join our gang, but he didn’t. Why? Maybe I should’ve quoted scripture to him? Maybe. Well, he wasn’t much fun by the time I got back to him. Only sixty days in and he wasn’t much in the way of pleasuring. I mean, I had to do it all. He gave me nothing. I had to lift his ass and spread his cheeks, he didn’t cooperate in anyway. Is that fair? Shit, I knew that his pimp was just about all out of patience. He only asked for one pack of cigs. A bad sign. But I had tried my nonviolent best. I had pleaded with the pimp to let him come over and die in Dorm D—the land of the COs. But he asked for just too much. Fifty cartons, can you believe that? This bitch was so far down that he’d never come back, so how fair was that offer?

## Vietnam baby

“... I walked into this village and what do you think I see? I see this old man, I mean wrinkled skin, toothless, with tattoos up and down everywhere and he’s skipping, like a kid skipping, around this little baby, for me it appears dead, almost yellow, and he’s waving a feather, looked like a chicken feather or something and he’s making the weirdest of noises, I mean it’s like chicken farts or pigs fucking, ha ha, something really weird and the folks around, they’re standing around looking like they’re hypnotized and then it dawns on me, hits me like a ton of bricks, they’re stoned! drugged out and I bet they killed the baby! and this old geezer is trying to spook us with his mumbo jumbo and I just knew, just knew this baby was part American, that some girl seduced one of our guys, I’ve heard about this, how they blow a guy and then run back with the sperm in their mouths and, Christ, just thinking about this makes me crazy! They’re just Satan’s Children, Father, Satan’s Children, I’m sure you’ve hear this, you having to hear all these terrible things, God Bless You Father,” long gulped pause, coming back on a slow train, “takes the sperm and Jesus help me! takes it and lies with another woman and blows it up her cunt,” rocketing frenzy, “and then they take the baby and kill it! like it’s an animal or something, Christ! and this was what they were doing, I’m sure of it, Father, they were doing their Satan thing, they were trying to kill the Spirit of America, the Soul of Christianity, that’s what McGurdy says, “The Soul of Christianity”... he’s been to college and he knows that stuff, Father, and that’s why I wasted them and that’s why we destroyed the village, all the animals, everything, McGurdy told us, “Just like General Joshua in the Old Testament!” ... yeah, Father, we are God’s Avengers, McGurdy told us, whooped and hollered and we all knew what we had to do, “God’s Avengers!” and I know, I know God understands, I don’t understand but God understands, isn’t that right, Padre?”

## Vietnam cock

“The fact is, Father, I have these moments, Father, it’s hard to say this in words but understand that I’m a Faithful Son of the Church, I try my best, but out there, in country, the bush, you’ve heard them tell it, hell, it’s different, I know you’ve been there, that’s why I’m here, and you’ve got to help me, feel free at anytime to interrupt me, rank’s not in order in here is it?” Nervous snort. “I understand the killing. I see what we’re doing, actually see it, like if I’m at Mass and you were there, I’m up on a hill somewhere and the boys are down there and we’re in a hot zone and the air is full of insect chatter and the land moves, the trees move, they are bush, a woman’s bush and as they separate her big cunt appears, like it’s the trees, they’re, sorta, like Moses at the Red Sea.” Jerky pause; jacked up enthusiasm: “Oh, yeah, it’s a vision, I’m sure, for our understanding, and the boys move through the jungle like tentacles, they’re colors, streams of colors and they approach her cunt, I can taste her, smell her, and the firefight lighting up the sky, Father, it’s like words, “No! No! No!!” (chuckling bemusement) “But it’s like any woman, saying No! when she means Do me! ... and they all become, they all merge, the colors and the boys, into a cock, that slithers like a snake, a big thick cock, yeah, big and thick! ...” (excitement splats!) “and then it all comes together, the boys and the rockets and her screams throughout the air and the cock just humping and humping and giving her a good ole fuck! and, and then it all explodes, like a gigantic orgasm, holy God Father, it’s true, it’s true, it’s like God’s fucking the Earth and we’re His cock and it’s all just, sorta, just like, I can’t think about it any other way, she’s screams like any bitch and Christ, Father, I’m, I’m just...just, it’s just so good, Father, so good, so good and I know that’s what it’s all about, all about...” (hopeful, perplexed, fascinated) “Is this something I should know about, Father? Or is it a test of my Faith?”

## Dreamer

*Just tell me*, how much of this do you believe? Ya know, I’d fuck your ass this way and that until Jesus himself comes back to puke. Ha. You’re such a dumb fuck dreamer that I don’t know what to do. Maybe just put you in a room and have you listen to John Lennon for eternity. Shit, how fucking-A cruel is that? Peace, man, peace!

# Part 3: THE CONFESSIONS OF FRIAR KILLIAN

The newly ordained Friar Killian understood that the Call to the priesthood was a call—a *vocatio,* a vocation—of the imagination. Although a Roman Catholic, his commitment to the monastic life, especially to being a Confessor, was anchored in the words of Martin Luther (a heretic!).

If you are a preacher of mercy, do not preach an imaginary but the true mercy. If the mercy is true, you must therefore bear the true, not an imaginary sin. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. *Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong (****sin boldly****)...”*

The Friar realized that being a confessor required both the desire and courage to daily listen to and confront the depravities of humankind. To feast with those who fete upon the pleasures of the flesh, but to do so, so as to absolve and so to cleanse. All the while knowing that it is but an absolution fully anticipating that such deviance will continue, be repeated, and his ear, counsel and absolution sought, again! Thus, so armed with Purity and Impurity, with Grace and Sin, the Friar sat down each day to confess all.

“Talking dirty,” became a mark of his Calling to be a Great Confessor. A Calling which required that he school his penitents so that they could accurately and fully describe and detail their sins, obvious and hidden. For if they did not confess all, would he not be remiss in his sacred duty of purifying them so that they could die in grace? Yes, he had to take them down the path of impurity, guide them into its alley-ways of filth, direct them towards roads which plunged into the muck and ooze of depravities: decadences which their bodies would eagerly embrace but for which their minds lacked words and images to recount and so repent.

*Curious*. But so always is the way of the divine, an astounding mystery to all humankind! Who was he to question what he took to be divine inspiration—that purification routes through putrefaction?

It was Luther’s complete insight that assured the Friar that his was the proper, though arduous, way.

...but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world**.** We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides. We, however, says Peter (2. Peter 3:13) are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign. (“Let Your Sins Be Strong.” *A Letter From Luther to Melanchthon*, 1521)

## Infidelity

From the start of his ministry, Friar Killian was the most sought after nuptial blesser in the diocese. He was specially sought because he brought an immense gratitude for sins yet to be committed, though this was perceived by the faithful as a gratitude which flowed and spouted in such intonations, incantations and gestures of exuberance and abundance that the young marrieds, and even all those in attendance, felt terribly and deeply loved. Yes, it was a terrible and deep love, yet one sourced in his dogmatically seasoned knowledge of the habits of human depravity and the need for holy purification of all who were gathering for the wedding feast. Effused before them, the Friar would scan the assembled congregation and savor the wicked air of future sins and inhale the odor of pursuing sanctity.

It was especially during the final days of ceremonial practice that the sharp and stenched odor of sins of the not too distant past twitched his spiritual nose. For Friar K knew that infidelity is the bond of families as well as the magnet for marrying. Yes, sacral Infidelity—Eden’s capital transgression and sin—like first degree murder, happens primarily between family-members. When a forthcoming marriage feast included many sons as ushers and Best Men, so, as Tradition and Revelation had verified time and again, Friar K knew that the bonds he was sanctifying were sinewed and twined by a fierce lust, one that resounded through the genes and the ages, a lust renewed (resurrected?) by those who, in gene and grace, had preceded these being married. A lust of desire by those who, also in gene and grace, would mingle their bloodlines on this most solemn occasion.

Yes, witnessing the sacred act of marrying pleased Friar Killian the most. For it ensured a steady flow of *true* penitents. Not that the engaged couple had not been sinners and penitents all their life. No, truly, all were sinners—as the story of Adam and Eve was there to remind us—from the moment of birth: Original Sinners; nakedness as sin, and all are born naked. No, as unmarried sinners they had already come to him stained and he had cleansed them. But he knew these past sins as false sins, and so all as false confessions. “True penitents,” so he knew, had to be nurtured, they did not spring forth from Nature. Yes, it was only during the pre-nuptial counseling sessions that the Friar had that special opportunity which he came to believe distinguished his Calling: namely, to change forever how the couple-to-be before him would sin from their marriage day forward.

During pre-nuptial counseling Friar Killian laid the first seed for true spiritual growth: a fulfilling which he knew must spring from a seed slacked and suckled by the deep waters of sexual desire; a seed set deep in fertile ground only through fierce sexual penetration. In this light, during their very first session, he would start to instruct them concerning the traditional expectations of Church and Society—faithfulness and procreation. But before the evening’s end he would begin his special work (“hit first hoe” as he came to describe this task) by laying special stress on marriage as a sacrament. It was just the simple but very sober statement, “A sacrament makes God present.”

The word “sacrament” the Friar knew would bounce off them as it repeatedly had when this theologically singular word had been spoken during Catechism classes. But, the word for him was, indeed, a seed—verily, true *verbum—*so he’d make his statement, then pause, much like the gardener pauses when the seed is first laid, that magical pause to see if the flower might spring into the moment, yet a pause of reverie more than of actual expectation. So, the Friar would pause, and if either one was paying any attention (and without fail, one would be snared) he might catch a furrowed brow or a wrinkled nose, an indication that, for the first time ever, the conjunction of marriage as “finally getting to fuck!” with “makes God present” would clash and clang in their minds. Such an unholy collision and noisy racketing is exactly what the Friar bent his ear to imaginatively hear!

During the Friar’s early years, after he had so joined fuck and God, he’d eye the one startled by the peculiar image and clamor and say, almost in a whisper: “Sex is the sacred act of procreation. Through sex you become a co-creator with God.” This was all good, solid traditional theology, and in those early years, it was all he could say, for he himself knew no more! Like them the conjunction of fuck and God, back then, always startled him, but, by some grace, it was what he knew was divine counsel. A counsel he knew in his better moments was as much for him as them, and so with them he breathlessly waited and listened, waited and listened until the stilling moment approached embarrassment and then his tongue would leap into action and rescue him. He’d take to prodding and probing, clawing at their filthy sins as if they were weeds: petting, jerking off, French Kissing, “feeling her up,” and “getting in her but not coming, I swear Father!” Yes, as he’d chase the plague of such unfulfilled sins he’d douse them with the sulfurous odor of brimstone, and this made them comfortable, sinners unrepentant such as they were and wanting to be damned! Yet, it would always be his to confess to himself that he was driven more by his own curiosity than by any supernatural knowledge or wisdom conferred on him through ordination.

These counseling seeds were planted and nurtured all in preparation for what the Friar considered his most solemn duty: the confession on the night before the wedding. It was to be their last confession as false sinners, and, his hope, their marrying into true sin. It was his moment, one critical, called *kairos,* that moment when as God’s representative here on Earth, as God’s chosen vessel, as one Ordained to be bearer of the Good News, here, he was to godly fuck them or to have them Fuck God. Ah, mere words (even oxymoronic words) failed him as words do at moments of rapture, of epiphanous embrace...and so, with more delight than most would draw forth from their wedding bed, so did the Friar tremulously grasp the confessional knob, trepidatiously turn it, with a deep breath pull the door open, enter, exhale and sit down. Soon to be lost in a moment of silence, so is he, before he obediently blesses himself and with great courage slithers the screen which separates him from that of God who has come to kneel before him and confess.

This was the special confessional moment the Friar faithfully held open for the carousing groom and his consort males until that parting hour of darkling embrace when soft morn’s light shamelessly exposes the expiring corpse of their bachelor party. The bride and her maids, however, came that same eve’s night promptly at the appointed hour of eight. All in all, the wedding party was, for Friar K, as much an entertainment as it was an opportunity for him to reach souls who had not been to confession for years—many men only confessed at such major events as funerals and weddings. Wondrously, there was something powerful in the sentimental air surrounding life’s ritual of first and last orgasm!

While Friar K knew that confessing the wedding party would catch him up on who was being unfaithful to whom and update his list of remaining virgins and those who were “living in sin”—fornicators—it was the bride and groom he waited most anxiously to confess. The groom would be the last to kneel before him. This a curious gesture and protocol of this locality, namely, that all in the Bachelor Party would confess and then depart the church, bestowing through this exiting gesture a measure of respect for the groom. In a sense they were honoring him, granting him a sacred privacy, a time without boundary, privacy without sentinel, for him to talk with “The Father.” The gesture and intention were all well and good and served Friar K’s purpose in an unexpected way. For he knew that this was to be the groom’s first confession “out of time,” indeed, “out of space”—truly a sacral moment.

Why the Friar considered this marriage confession to be sacral is that both the bride and groom knelt before him in an altered state of consciousness. The groom had been so raggedly teased and congratulated and gifted and doomed by prophecies of the loss of his sexual powers...so drenched in euphoria by the inflated claims for his yet untested (ahem!) sexual prowess, that he was “out of his mind” in the good sense. The sense that was sacred. The groom was in “another time” and “another place.” He would be acutely aware of leaving a Past and entering a Future. Somewhere deep inside him he knew that he would be challenged, possibly killed, murdered, yet this all excited him.

As for the bride, she would be obediently and promptly kneeling there and blessing herself the moment after the Friar, himself, entered the booth. This would be as eight was struck, and her confession would last as long as it had to last. For the Friar had his work to do, and if he didn’t reach them tonight, he might never reach them. He had to place images in their minds that were never there before. He had to work deeply into depravity if he was ever to prepare them for grace. This confession was *the* time for him to set these young marrieds on their journey together, not just as sexual partners, not just as family, but as new Adams and Eves: primal sinners, sacral lusters: God Fuckers.

1.

"So, my child, is this your first affair?"

Words of response are strangled by her tongue. Silence.

The Friar closes his eyes and listens. How is she breathing? Stoppered breath was a sure sign of virginal violation. And this one is smothering small gasps!

“Eve, my child, was formed from the rib of Adam. Do you know what that means?”

Still strangled.

Though more mute than he wanted, Friar K knew that this was his moment. By this time—mere hours before “the event”—she would be already deep into an altered state. This was so because by the time she knelt she had spent months, sometimes more than a year, in preparation, and part of that preparation was being kidded about “Men. Now, you’ll understand what I’ve been putting up with! Men are beasts and are children. The beast takes what he wants when he wants and knows no better—just in their hormones, dear. *Tsk!* And the child never knows what it has taken and so gives nothing back.” After this she’d hear the insanely unanswerable question, “Are you sure you want to do this?” What could the answer be but “Yes.” For all her life she was raised “to be as pretty as a flower” and to “save yourself for your husband” and to “be a good girl.” And behind all that was one simple Catholic message: good girls save themselves so that they can have lots of babies!

But Friar Killian knew the age, and knew the girl’s breathing, and so knew the sin. Oh, how easy it would be for him if she just confessed and blabbed it all out!

“My child, as woman you belong to man. You are his flesh. You are like an arm or a leg ... lean closer, child. You are to become Eve,” and his voice is stern, “so *pay attention*!” And he can feel her obedient breathing, close to him, fresh and sweet is her obedience. Ah, the Friar’s hands begin to sweat and he rubs them on his robes, this the moment he most cherishes.

“Child, you are to become Eve. You are to put yourself, all of yourself, every part of yourself” and he stresses again “*every part* of yourself ... in the hands of your husband.”

The words have hit their target. Her voice is one of perplexed eagerness. “Eve? Father, but Eve tempted Adam and he *sinned*.” The Friar smiles amid the shadows, happy that here was one who paid attention to the good Sisters during Catechism class.

“Yes, my child, Adam did sin. And now you are to know. This is the purpose of your marrying, to sin and to sin so deeply and grievously that you will find salvation in the Christ!”

Silence. Eager breathing. The Friar smiles, again.

“But his brother...” And so the spell is broken, she has named her sin and she is ashamed.

Quick as the medic on the battlefield, the Friar is at her soulful side, asking in the compassionate tone of the healer (“Does it hurt, here.. or here?”) “My child...*Eve*, did you let him fondle you?”

He waits.

Slowly, truly submissive, “Yes.”

“Did you fondle him?”

A rushed, “Oh, no!”

Picking up the pace, checking off the list—her voice like one drowning, “Did he take you into his mouth?” No response. Did she leave? Sternly, “I mean did he suck you?” A timid, “Yes”—with a hint of pride. So the Friar knows that she is definitely big of breasts!

“Did he play with you?” Again, a mute echo of stupidity. “I mean did he finger your, your vagina,” and not waiting to assess her biological knowledge, “your pussy, did he stroke you and make you dripping wet?” An edge of irritation. Returned with an inquiring, “No?!”

“Let me cut to the chase, my child, did he come?”

“I believe so.”

Flunked. Definitely an F.

“*Believed*. Didn’t you feel him? Was his cock deep within you, working you, did he push and press, grunt and groan and then appear to die?”

Innocence refound, “Oh, no, Father. No. No. He was too drunk. At least I think that was it.” Pause. “And I didn’t look.”

Oh, Friar Killian was beginning to tire. It would take him years to get her on the road to salvation. And today he was physically tired. He had scheduled too many marriages this month, of such was he now taking note. Yet, as Holy as the Spirit must be, so it was time for him to invoke the Spirit Profane.

“My child,” a deep weary sigh, “are you fair of face.”

Quickly, “Yes.” At least he had vanity to tap.

“Are you full of bosom.”

A titter. Need more be heard?

“Is your body a flame atop the candle?”

He regretted his poetic flight at once.

“What?”

“I mean are you hot? When you walk by do men whistle and shout and break out into a sweat?”

Vanity, again. Breathlessly, “Men *like* me.”

“My child, I want you to understand *how* to be Eve. *How*. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Listen. Adam was a spiritless idiot. He just idled around. Until God grabbed his rib and made woman. Now, listen closely. That rib made Adam jump up and run around doing things. It made Adam master of the world. It made Adam crazy to have babies. And babies are new souls. Souls who are children of God, do you understand, my child?”

Hesitantly, “I think so.”

Brusquely, “No you don’t! You don’t and you can’t until you’ve married. That’s why you’re getting married tomorrow. Because men need to be tempted. They need to lust. They need to be unfaithful. Hear me, they need to lust after every woman they see. It is this lust which is holy and sacred. From it springs babies.” The Friar pauses; retelling the tale is refreshing. (For a later confession would he now hold the correction that the rib was the penis, something she’d understand better once married, how grabbing a man’s dick was to tread on the border of the creative, a jerk towards dying and towards splattering life all about...but for now the symbol of the rib would do.)

“Every man who comes to church tomorrow wants to marry you. Every man—the old men, the young men, the boys, the brothers” (he halts at mentioning himself) “all want you. And you must be their temptation. Offer the Apple of Infidelity. Do you understand?”

Rotely, “I think so.”

“Your body is *for* them. And *their* bodies are for you. Every body. And every part of their body.” Then in a disciplined tone, “But it is too impractical for you to fuck,” and her gasp slaps him before his tongue can catch the stray, “them all, I mean have intercourse with you.” And he streams on, “It is simply a matter of practicality that you are marrying one man. But from a spiritual perspective you are to marry them all. You are to see them as the Body...and I’m speaking in capitals here, like Sister told you in class, the Body of Christ, understand that?...and they see you as their Body. When you enter the bedroom you are going to bed with all of those men, all those Adams, from time back and for time into the future. This is a new spiritual truth, isn’t it, my child?”

She is quick, “Father, is this right. If I think like that won’t I be a whore?”

As quick, “No, my child, you will be like Eve, mother of all.”

What will she say? Is there any hope here? Maybe this is all too much. Maybe you are too tired, Padre?

“Is that why I let his brother ...”

“Yes.”

“But I shouldn’t let his brother?”

Ah, now the good Friar must practice his own discipline. This is a truth too robust for her young mind. Now he must lie and so seed a truth for a later confession.

“That’s correct, my child, the brother is not yours in body but he is yours in spirit. There is nothing wrong with desiring, with craving his brothers, for they are family.”

Then comes a question which mildly shocks the Friar, leading him to question his initial judgment about this young woman, “And if I’m having sex and I think of the brother doing it to me, that’s okay?”

Sigh, “Yes, my child.”

Silence. His of greater tiredness. Hers of rusted cogitation.

“Now, listen, while I give you your absolution and penance.”

Her breath is soft upon the wire mesh separating them.

“Your penance is to throw off your chains and restraints. To submit yourself to your husband’s every wish and desire. If he wants you to suck him, then suck him hard and soft. If he wants you to waltz around the house half-naked, then serve him. If he wants you to kneel on all fours and let him ride you, then buck and ride him till he is spent. If he wants to be stroked, then stroke him till he screams and begs for mercy. *Whatever* it is, do it! Do you understand?”

Feverishly, “Yes, Father.”

“But there is more. Allow yourself to be his. Hold back nothing. You must become truly naked as Eve was *before* the temptation. This nakedness is what makes the temptation work. You must enjoy yourself, and call your husband—*demand* of him!”...and his voice rises stern and commanding on “demand”...“demand of him that he enjoy you and that you enjoy him. Savor the hard cock in your mouth. Suck down his frenzy juices. Buck and buck and wriggle and scream, pound on him as he fucks you“ (and this time neither gasps nor pauses) ” fucks you until you are satisfied, until your legs are weary and your arms like lead pipes, your cunt drenched in a pool of desire or dried by the fires of raging lust.” Friar K feels the Fiery Spirit moving him! (That Snake!) “Unless you open your every part, he will not be yours, you will not be married. Do you understand?”

Exhaustedly, “Yes,”

His first labor was done. The first, small but key, stone set on her pathway towards marrying. Towards the divine mystery so profane—the conjunction of Heaven and Hell. Towards Faithful Infidelity. As she leaves, the confessional’s heavy door shuts with a quiet, wearied reverence.

2.

After an early hour’s recitation of Matins by himself, a set of prayers this day he offered while kneeling before Her: Virgin Mother—it did not elude him that she was beautiful this early in the morning—it was after this that he made a quick trip to and back from the kitchen. Brother Euclid’s ever ready morning pot was brewing...so the Friar lifts his large cup (others would call it a bowl) of coffee and slips into the confessional to wait. Wait for the near-husband and his staggering troupe which would all be bleary-eyed and stinking of every conceivable sin from the barely concluded Bachelor’s Party.

The groom was well known to Friar Killian. In fact, he often reflected upon how much the groom’s first chapters of life had been so much like his own: from a large family, an altar-boy, excelled at track and baseball, graduate of an esteemed Jesuit college, and then, a buck and run into the wildings of the times. As he drained the last drop of the nerve jacking and heart thumping bean, the Friar heaved a deep sigh—a combination of the exhalation of sleep’s departure with a wistful breath exhaling and exhuming remembrances of times past. Before the memories could testify to pain or pleasure, the sentinel knob grated out a brassy alarm, “He is here!” The confessional door opened, at first with metallic hesitancy as the knob was turned and the lock slid back, then with a bravado flourish as a body bounded into the murky light which embraced the penitent as he knelt and hurriedly crossed himself: “Bless me Father for I have sinned...”

A brief hour had routed the troupe, and it only took minutes before Friar K knew what the others had so cowardly failed to confess as the groom-to-be gave the full details of his “last party.”

“You what?” came out a bit too detective-like for the Friar. Actually, he was a bit amused at the story of the Party’s raunchy depravity but humor failed to move him before three o’clock in the afternoon.

“A wine bottle. With the neck of a wine bottle. Do you understand?”

Ah, such whimsical arrogance. “If you had sat here like I have for just one month you’d know not to ask me if I understand!” But Friar Killian keeps this as thought, not words. Instead, he beckons with his finger—a habit, not an indicator which could be see0—and whispers, monotonously, “Go on.”

It had been the usual for an Italian affair. There was a lot of talk in the early evening about sex, but it had been “soiled talk” not dirty stuff. That’s because his father, uncles and older men had been invited. They came, knowing also when they should leave, and made jokes about “finally becoming a man!” and “getting some” and others chortling, “Yeah, get very little *some*!” These were men who had been married awhile. Most of whom were not Friar Killian’s penitential flock. In the main, for them, sex was procreative, never recreational and certainly not spiritual. Little would they understand of the Friar’s methods and theology.

The bawdiest joke in this first part of the party was his Uncle Giordano handing him a present. It turned out to be a pack of condoms. “Do you know what these are for?” The older men hooted and howled, slapped their thighs and bent over in laughter’s tears. The groom blushed a bit and let the good humor flow. He knew that they meant that now he’d never have to use these, but that they also meant that all sex was to be, from now on—and none asked if he had ever gotten any, not asking about virginity, more wanting to goad on his masculinity—from now on sex was for making babies.

When they left, the marijuana bongs appeared and a few tabs of LSD were circulated. Finally, the groom was alone with his peers, who knew what had to happen. Who also knew what the others had ever done. It was that time and they of that age. They had talked and counted— “Scored?”—and kept a tally of the “good girls” who were good but no longer “goods.”

These were men who were not ashamed to see another man’s cock. Not that they would ever in the remotest instance consider homosexuality, being “good Catholics” as it were, but that they were not ashamed of their bodies. Their fathers had never peed in the same public bathrooms with them, at least not where their sons could watch. These young men, in stark contrast, had talked about Free Sex, searched for it, and wanted it.

*Ta da!* When “the chicks” arrived, no one was shocked. All were prepared. It was like cognac after a fine dinner. And “chicks” here meant girls, not whores but working girls, some even in college, friends of friends who knew how to give a guy a good time, all with a “Hippie Chick” mentality even if they weren’t Hippies—three chicks.

That they were a trinity amused the Friar, but it was lost on the groom. He just talked about how “the guys said, Do it *now* or *never* do !” And though this was the cardinal ignorance—being an ignorance of how true infidelity was grounded—for the moment the Friar just listened.

“I was drunk” became a refrain and a conjunctive which drove the Friar to continually, but with practiced patience, comment, “I don’t care if you were drunk. What was it like?” And the groom talked on.

“It all began with just some strip-teasing and some petting, gees, these girls had great boobs,” and the Friar could almost see the groom’s hands cup and fondle the depthless darkness of the confessional, “really great boobs, but then one goes down on my buddy, ya know, like she’s showing me that she’s cool and he’s just bouncing all over the place with this chick latched onto his dick and when she comes she shows me his stuff on her tongue and swallows it. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Father, I’ve never ever had that.”

Then comes one of the stops: those moments of momentary harsh consciousness, moments which the Friar hoped were prelude to spiritual break-through; but not yet.

“So the other two come onto me. One’s stroking me and pinching me, working me like I’m a water pump or something and I’m so drunk I can’t figure out whether I’m coming or not and the other starts working on my back, nipping and licking me up and down my back, biting my butt—*jesus!—*kissing me down to my ankles, and as the other one swallows my cock this broad wiggles her fingers into my ass and I go ballistic, I mean, it must be the greatest sin ever, right Father, I know, but it was incredible, *incredible.*”

If it wasn’t for the groom’s sheer exhaustion, the Friar knows that he would not be so honest, and more, he knows that he will deny this to his memory and never, ever discuss it “out in the open” with the Friar. But these are the moments of reward for the Friar—those precious moments of insight into the raw presence of the divine incarnated. (“*Consummatum est*!”)

“Then we were all in a chain. One sucking me. I’m eating another and the other girl was playing with the one sucking me and my buddies were taking turns fucking whatever pussy was lonely and it went on, Christ, I don’t know how long.” Not a moment for chronological accuracy, and no need for the Friar to know duration, just the degree.

“It’s all just a blur, most of it, did it over and over again, I guess.” He stops. The Friar knows that the telling has awakened the groom and that this moment of spiritual nakedness will soon quickly evaporate. But there was an upsurge of energy, something came into the booth like dark light, and the groom asked with intensity and earnestness, “Could anything so good, like so pleasurable, so crazy but so satisfying be bad?” But before the Friar could answer, the groom broke into a sob, “I’m damned, aren’t I, Father?”

The sobs carried the seeds of the spirituality the Friar knew he had to root out, but did he have time or had it slipped by?

“My son, there are stages in spiritual growth, do you understand?” No response, but no sobs; he was listening.

“What are sins for the unmarried are not sins for the married. You know that?” He pauses a moment to let it sink in, fearful however of awakening too much of the rational in the groom, of rousting those terrifying sentinels and howling guardians from his Catechism past.

“Just as sexual intercourse in marriage is not a sin, so are the pleasures of the flesh not a sin. Rather they are gateways to spiritual enlightenment, fulfillment. You do understand that, don’t you?”

“Father, but sex in marriage is not Free, its married sex.”

*Hell,* his mind’s ticking like a slow clock; bad sign.

“Wrong, only in marriage is sex free.”

“Yeah.” Sarcastic sneer.

He may be a lost case.

“Listen, my son, what was the worst thing that happened last night, the one thing you could never ever talk with anyone other than your buddies about?”

Hard silence. This had not been here yet. Truly a cloaking silence; not even a mumbling.

“There is nothing I haven’t heard.”

Crisp. Snapping. A statement without tone or emotion. “One of the chicks was black.”

“And...”

Don’t let him cork it!

“Black. *Fucking black*. And you know what? I liked her the best. I was really wild with her, she’s like no girl I’ve ever been with, she, she, shit, she was happy, a real happy fuck, and I’ve never had that. Not just Free but happy. Smiling. She loved what we did to her. Shit, she wanted it more and more, and I know it wasn’t because it was some good Eye-Talian pasta or any shit like that, and fuck she wasn’t drunk out of her mind like the other babes, naw, she was bold, just fucking-A a great lay and she played us till we all dropped.” Truly confessional. A splurge. Sacral ejaculation! And “dropped” was the drop off point, the end—he had said what he had come to say, and to accept the wrath and punishment of the angry Father.

“Mary was Jewish,” said the Friar.

No response, only a grunted, “Huh?”

“Mary was Jewish. A good Catholic boy like you wouldn’t sleep with a Jewish girl, would you?” No need to wait for a response. “Yet we worship Mary, don’t we, as the Mother of God.”

Soft silence. Regular breathing.

“You see, my son, to find God you have to sleep with the women who you, up till now, have considered forbidden or evil or pagan. I know that this is hard to hear.”

“What are you saying?”

“What the black chick—young woman—shared with you was that part of being a woman you didn’t know women would share, right?” *Don’t stop*. “There’s nothing forbidden about Jewish girls or Black girls...they’re all just girls, women, understand?” *Sure he does!* “When you take your wife to bed, DON’T look at her like she’s the Virgin Mother. She’s not Jewish you know.” And the Friar laughs at his own sly humor. “She’s woman. She’s as black as that Black girl and as Jewish as Mary...Mary, think about this, I’m sure somewhere you’ve heard a joke about this, well, Mary had sex with God! *Okay?* Let me ask, so what does that say about sex? But that it’s a godly thing!”

A choked off laugh, “Father, am I hearing you right?”

“Truly my son, you are now about to enter into a sacramental bond. You are to become supernatural. Through this sacramental bond grace is bestowed upon you. And what is the bond? It is not just sex, “getting some” or “getting off” as you’ve known it till today. No, it *is* like last night, like what you were feeling with the Black girl. The bond is satisfaction of such an incredible depth that like God in *Genesis* you’ll say, “It is good!” Do you understand?”

“I’ve never heard it said that way.” Monotone, but curiosity edged.

“Marrying is a life-long act of joining, embracing. Which means a life-long act of not-joining, of not embracing. See, you can only be unfaithful to your wife because she’s the only one willing to be faithful to you. *Get it?* Look, while you have one partner, it doesn’t mean that you can’t fuck other women.” The Friar pauses. “In fact, you can only really fuck other women because you’re faithful to your wife. She’s the one, the only one who will, who can take you into the deeper pleasures of sex, into the truly spiritual realms of fucking.” The Friar half-laughs knowing the effect of what he’s about to say, “and if you’re lucky you’ll be screwing the same broad for twenty or thirty years...and liking it!”

The groom bursts out in a bellow. What did that sound like to the those attending the 5:30 Mass?

“Shhhhhh!”

Both share a space of quiet communion.

“Don’t think that your wife isn’t Black or isn’t Jewish. She is. She’s mystery and pleasure. But,” and he knows this is where he has to end for now, “you’ve got to get some experience under your belt before this will all make sense. Now, what I want you to do for your penance is think every dirty thought you can about your lovely bride to be. I want you to imagine enjoying every pleasure of her flesh. Now, I don’t know if you want to think about the wine bottle stuff,” he chuckles, “but think about her as an adventure. Her body is a map of where your life is going. Explore it. Yes, I know that you will invade her and conquer her and do all that, fine, *fine,* but take some time and play with her, be graceful with her body, treat her like a good Port, for she is sweet...*hear me*, you are both grapevines and your first vintage will not be your best!”

“Father,” guiltily, so the Friar knew he was now a bit too sober, “What if I can’t forget about the Black chick?”

“As part of your penance, what I will now call a Discipline, and it is something I want you to do every day, *every day*, understand? I want you to *never forget* the Black Chick. I want you to find her in your wife. See, my son, women are not chattel or property or something to have, none of them are, and your wife, above all, she’s the only one who is committed to “going all the way.” She’s the only one who is committed to being *unfaithful* to all other men. Unfaithful to them as she brings all of them into your sexual embrace, your spiritual imagination. And for you she is every other woman. See, you can find, must find, the Black Chick in her...that’s why she is marrying you, so that you can find and have every good piece of ass you’ve ever desired and which you will ever desire. You must desire *more* women, now, every day. You must desire *more* sex. More blow jobs. More quickies. More long hours in the sack. More unimaginable acts of your sexual imagination.” With a deep and exhaling breath, that of the racer crossing the finish line, “You are free to have sex! To have sex which frees you!”

Would this new husband understand his own role? How he was to be for his wife as she was for him? How together, now never alone, now never isolated, but as a married person, that together they are Body, and so all bodies are for them? Would he practice fucking his wife? Practice having dirty thoughts all the time? Practice lusting through every woman? Would he unfetter his imagination? Would he start to eat the Apple...share it with her?

“Just come back to confession, at least twice a month. Swear it before God and the Virgin Mother.”

“I swear.”

The door opened and shut, and before the fagged Friar could flee another shadow knelt down. The Friar checks his watch. The 5:30 Mass has started. This must be one of those “*anxious*” to be spotless before Communion is distributed.

As the Friar slithers the screen to hear, blind eyes of fear flash before him. Eyes quavering on a voice which is stuttering at the edge of the Act of Contrition. The Friar laughs, but only to himself, wordless and without sound; sniggling at the terror which must have paralyzed this one while waiting in line—wondering why the unknown groom had stayed so long—thinking that the Friar had reamed this foul penitent to Hell and back! Which meant that he must be primed and waiting like a jackal—waiting for the next depraved chickens as the farmer at the execution block...but Friar Killian knew that what God had chosen him to do was done for today, and that the rest of these sinners, false mostly he’d conjecture, these false sinners he would dispense summarily, at least for today.

## Covetousness

“*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife*. When I first heard it I thought they said “*cover*”! Ha! Ha! Ain’t that just like a kid?”

Friar K hated the joke; it was stale—older than him; for sure dating back to Tyndale and all those guys who did translations. But he hated it more because he used to use it himself!

“You forced her into adultery.”

“I didn’t force her.”

“That’s a double sin. Fornication for you and adultery for her.”

*Was this a bad echo in the Friar’s own conscience?*

What was it about married women, especially to certain single men? What was the attraction? Certainly there was the allure of “experience” and the hope—often dashed in the first moments of bedding down—that she’d “know things” and “do things” which no single women knew or would do. If that was true, then she’d have to be a teacher type, someone picking up on a single guy because she wanted to educate him. Friar K laughed, knowing that that was rarely, if ever, the motivation.

Maybe it was that she was willing to take a risk? That the act had the excitement of criminality about it? Of outlaw dash and bravado? Hmm, that was more than likely what lured the guy. Stealing another man’s booty. Taking his best bottle of wine. Swindling him out of some of his profits. Things like that. *Maybe.*

“Isn’t fornication good enough for you?”

“Father!”

“Do you relish watching another man be betrayed?”

How often the Friar, when Friar-to-be, had mulled that question over.

It’s not just the sex. Can’t be. No one’s ever said, “The sacrament of marriage really makes pussy sweeter!” Or things like that. And guys are still wacko about single girls being virgins, so what’s so attractive about the ringed finger?

“Can I tell you something, Father. I mean in real secret?”

“My child.”

“I only do it with men who have kids.”

A twist. “Yes.”

“I mean, why do I do that?”

*Covet*: desire for, a hankering, greedy desire, addictive, crazed...*what?*

The stealing’s obvious. *You have it, I want it*. But it’s not stealing, no, not exactly, more, maybe, the joy’s in having the other person know. Maybe not at the beginning, but it has to come. What’s an affair that no one knows about? Where’s the pleasure?

The Friar remembers. *Sally*. Voluptuous. Brimming with energy ; mostly unaware of her affect on others: women didn’t take to her, men did. But she married young, so this was a weed that didn’t grow high.

She banged a tambourine and her husband played guitar— Folk Masses.

He wasn’t aware back then, but deep inside his psyche she was the Sacrifice.

He befriended them both. Sorta actually liked her man, Fred. But couldn’t keep himself from her. At first she appeared totally unaware. He’d talk with her whenever he could, whenever it seemed casual and accidental.

Then Fred’s father died and he left town; she was to follow. Ah, he remembers how it took him not a minute but he was at her door, ringing. When she answered, it was clear that she was glad to see him.

“I heard about your father-in-law.”

She just nodded and left the door ajar as she walked back into the kitchen. He entered and closed it.

“Were you close?”

“Not really. Actually, he wanted Fred to marry another girl. His high school sweetheart.” Sigh. “She got killed last summer in an auto accident.”

“Sorry.” Words without point of reference; all he can focus on is her breasts. Sally was just twenty and she gave a hard-on to any admirers of Rubens. One can joke about “Milk Maids,” but he got thirsty, deeply parched, as she walked around.

“Coffee?”

“Sure.”

“Milk?”

She played James Taylor’s “Suzanne.” It’s the song that chained his heart to her: “Suzanne takes you down to a place by the river...” The words made his heart race; his soul ache. For as she turns from the stereo, he takes her in his arms and kisses her hard. Could he say she melted in his arms? Christ, it was like she pierced his clothes; more like water. At the time, his mind had no conscious thought, all was instinctive dancing.

*All day?* Yes, at least the remainder of the day and the early morning.

And it is as clear as any sin which wends its way through the penitential darkness.

He was not a virgin; certainly not she.

But he lost a certain virginity that night, *that* he knew even back then. Knew it because of the hunger. Wracking pains in his gut. Not ones that could be soothed by physical rubbing, no, those deep pains of the psyche which play out in the lost recesses of muscles and bones about which science knows yet so little.

She was not “experienced.” Not like some of the women he had played around with. No, but she was *addictive.* A word that sprung into his mind the moment he got home, took a shower, popped several aspirin and was settling into bed: “I want her!” He could hear himself saying over and over again, not by voice or lips or even sign language but from the abyss of his being; not even “I need her,” no, just “I *want* her!” Unsated and insatiable hunger.

Six months of “cheating.” Not for him, no, for him it was “love-making.” She was the one who had to cheat time and promises and the accuracy of her whereabouts. But she never complained. He, back then, did not ask how it was for her. He just kept...kept...[*confess it!*] eating her.

*Eating*. What’s in that word?

There was a transference here. Something he only suspected back then, but left as an un-nourished seed. Now, it is the word; here, decades after his Ordination —his own sacrament.

He ate her. Again. Then, *again*. Drooling craven lust.

Her face. Her smell. Her image. Her memory. Her absence. Her every aspect.

He was ravenously consuming her, in every aspect of who *her* was.

Sexually, he had at her from the first opportune moment. And it *was* different than with others. There was something empowering about licking her cunny and going “69.” Which they did the first time, and then every time.

Her belly was like licking jelly off a piece of bread. It rolled a bit under his tongue and he could suck a lick into his mouth and play with it with his lips. But it was her smell as well as taste. Her skin had an odor—not to his conscious mind then like the waxy air in the sanctuary, but it was like that—and he got buzzed when inhaling her. As he roamed all over the map f her flesh, she groaned. Soft, muted groans; endlessly enticing.

Whenever his hands lay across her pubis, she stopped making sounds, all shifted and her breathing paced him. He delighted in touching her; his eyes widened, his flesh tingled, his cock saluted...and *ached*. She was like stirring his finger around a bowl of ice cream, like that, and like Jell-O when you first take it out, a bit of resistance but a certain pleasure of touch: fingertips and lips. Quickly she becomes wet, very wet, and his middle-finger would glide, skate in and out of her, over and around her clitoris...her breathing intensified: came in gulps, then jerks, then long pauses—somewhere he mused, “Is she dying?” Suddenly, an uprush of groans, but this time like bellowing, almost painful—she’d shudder: small tremblings, then her legs would snap a big kick, not high off the bed but as if an electric jolt just lifted her body—it was then that he knew he was “in.” From there it was sheer madness! *Don’t stop! Don’t...!* She’d pull him up and start kissing him, nipping with teensy biting...at the same time he’d flip into her, or if he was off target she would be guiding his penis before he knew what was happening. Together, they locked. “Locked and loaded!” always echoed somewhere in the frenzy of the moment.

Could he get this crazed about a single women? Never did. (*Confessio!* Sunflower. But later; *later*.)

Was it just that he and Sally were sex-mates? “Playmates?”

No, *no*, he told himself a thousand times, and still says *No* to that question.

What then? Soul-mates. *Maybe*.

This, a question he has left unformed, for now he is a priest.

The Friar waited on the coveting sins of others. Waited as an anthropologist does when in the field, working a dig.

Bones were a-plenty. Every week, covetousness was high on the Sin Parade.

“Tell me, why is she different?”

This one was a repeat offender! The Friar treasured the clues he offered.

“I don’t know. There’s this satisfaction. Maybe that’s not the right word. But when I pet her, yeah, it’s like she’s fuller. Not just a girl but a woman, in the sense of fuller.”

“Fuller? More buxom?”

“No,” amused paused, “like there’s more than just teat there. What can I say? Look, you know with many girls that other guys have been there, but with a married woman you really know. Know that they’ve been there, that they’ve lost. Her husband won. Now, I’m the winner. I get it all.”

“*It?*”

“Yeah, *it*. But, okay, ha, I can’t say what *it* is. Ha.”

“No, no, try.”

“Her *other* way. You understand my reference now, Father, yes?” No stopping. “When I’m there I know that desire is there. Her desire. That I’m there because she has so much desire that her husband isn’t enough. That I’m not enough. I hate her when I’m there because I realize I’m no better than her husband, ya know, that her husband’s like me. This all, see, it came to me once—I cursed her for treating me like her husband...and for giving her husband freedom.”

“Freedom?”

“Yup. For sure.” Snorts. “Freedom. Crazy word, eh? But somehow when I’m in her it’s like she’s free. Free to do with me what she wants. Free to do with her husband what she wants. At times, I get angry...I just fuck her and fuck her harder and harder...I keep thrusting into her until she starts flipping out and hitting me and starts yelling, “I can’t breathe!” *That* just makes me crazier and by this time my cock’s numb and dead and I’m not feeling a thing. I’m just sweating and huffing and forcing myself to do it...hell, I want her to die! To die, yeah, right there—*ha, ha*, I see myself still stuck in her when the police come. They start asking me questions. I talk to them though I’m still in her. Then it ends—always the same way, one cop asking, “Are you enjoying her?” And I say, “The best!”

They both pause. They sense their fraternity.

“What do you think about her husband?”

“I think he’s a lucky guy. Really.”

“But if she were your wife.”

Stone quiet.

“If?”

“Crimes of Passion. You don’t go to hell for crimes of passion, do you, Father?!”

It had been an unfocused confession. At times, the Friar loses track: “Bad Sin Day!” he jokes to himself.

“I just like it, Father. So?”

“You like just what, my child?”

“The men wanting to fuck me. My husband knowing.”

“You tell him?”

“I get him to watch.”

“Yes?!”

“Sometimes he hides in the closet. Other times, we do some swapping. I like swapping the best. I really don’t like it when he’s watching and the guy doesn’t know. Makes me feel dirty.”

“You prefer that he’s getting...how should I say it, ‘Equal treatment’?”

“Uh huh.”

“Okay!”

“There’s no sin in watching, is there, Father? I mean it’s just like watching a porno flick. It’s naughty but it ain’t really sinful, is it, Father?”

Somewhat exasperated, “Well, it’s at least a venial sin. Hmm, I wonder?”

Off on her own: “Yeah, when he watches me I like to think he’s like a teacher giving me a grade. He gives me *A’s*. I know he likes it, a lot. Ya see, it helps him. He tells me this. He likes to have me right after a guy leaves...says I’m even more desirable, that it turns him on to know how much other guys like me, ‘specially if they’ve asked me to do something and he sees me turn them down. Like I don’t give them blow jobs when he’s looking. But he likes to hear them ask. And he really likes it when I tease a guy. Stroke him and give his cock a kiss or two but then don’t do it! *Isn’t he the devil!* I mean, he tells me it drives him crazy later when I do suck him and it makes him feel even more that I love him. And I have to tell ya, he’s really a great lover after something like that.”

“Let’s see if I’m understanding this, this “confession” of yours, you’re telling me this but they’re not serious sins to you, just something which helps your marriage?”

“If you say so, Father.”

“Me?”

“I think you’re right, Father. Thanks.”

*How fast can I recite the Absolution?!*

Covetousness is supposed to be linked to Faithfulness. In some sense a violation of that. *I who covet have no right to that which I covet, and to obtain it is to cause a violation of someone else’s faithfulness.*

“I have been faithful, you must grant me that.”

“Must?”

“Would you doubt it? I may drink a bit too much, and not pay attention to him as I should, or as he wants me to, but I’ve never fooled around. I don’t even think about fooling around.”

“That’s hard to believe. Not just you, just anyone.”

“But it’s true. I didn’t even like dating, because it was, was so superficial. I wanted to met Mr. Right and then *bingo!* get married.”

“Okay.”

“It was sorta like that. Tom and I met—he was only my third date—I knew it was him as soon as he shook my hand. I knew that I’d stay with him.”

“Love at first sight, an old story.”

She was quiet, in a way which resembled holding her breath.

“My child?”

“*Not like that*.”

Now, he waited. Just placed his left hand under his chin and waited.

“Not like that. Not like ‘I know this is the man who’ll be the father of my children.’ Not like that. No. Like he would be there. *Stable*. Just right.”

“Do you love him?”

“Of course! What a thing to ask!”

“No, not like that, not just *he’s my sweetheart* but like ‘Would you give up your life to save his?’ Like that?”

“If its our time, then we go. I can’t interfere with God’s plans.”

“No, my child...”

“Father, God is merciful. God is generous. If Tom died, then I’m sure The Lord would send me another man.”

*The worst! The worst! Sin without passion. Lucifer, you’re a bitch!*

The Discipline’s insight always came out sounding trite. “What you want in others, you can find in your own marriage.” Always, that never took on the first go round. *How to demonstrate their superficiality without exposing your own, eh, Friar?* He himself had failed so roundly at this that he had the greatest of patience and of tolerance for their repeated failures and stupidities.

To the wife: “My child, you don’t covet *enough*.” *Am I always going to be handing out these cute counter-points?* “What I want you to consider is that you do *not* covet your husband enough. That there are experiences, passions, emotions, adventures in him that you have not even attempted to discern. This is all a failure of your imagination. Do you understand?”

To her husband: “My son, you don’t covet enough. The reason marriage is a sacrament is that the human body is the soul, the spirit. It is sacred geography. And there are routes and pathways and trails for you to follow which will take you into undiscovered territory—plunge you into valleys of darkness and place you atop hills of swooning inspiration!”

To both: “Covet each other. For there are strangers inside you. Especially your spirit side. Aliens within you. Aliens from other dimensions. Other lands. And the pleasures of sex are just like tickets at the gate. They are not all that is to be found, no, more, they are the starting point.”

“Your wife is in her kisses the desires of all men, and every man she has met. When you kiss her, steal this...and wander with it. Why do these men desire her? Why is it that you cannot contain their desire? That their desire arouses your desire, whether it is to kiss her or kill her or just scream until you cry? Why should you be happy that she is so kissable?”

“Your husband, when you press against his chest, he is the strength you must covet. Feel him. Outline his muscles and bones; pectorals and ribs. Let your hand take in his desire to protect you, to crush you up and form you as his heart...for he is all men. And you can accept them. Accept and feel the terror of their desire: that of your father for whom you are cherished; of your brothers whose hearts beat with you own; of the boy next door who wants to capture you and put you on a pedestal...feel their terrible mixed-up terror, one of ancient memories and long-suffering hopes. These are there. His body pulsates with this desire, this knowledge...lie with him, close, pulsate with him.”

“Where have her feet walked? What has the earth said to her, messaging through the stones and dirt she has trod upon? Treasure these feet. They hold up the universe of desire and pleasure which you crave. *Listen, see*. Place them upon your head and let yourself flow upward into her. *Hear, sense*. Place your head inside her southern cradle and crawl back into the womb. Do all this and more. Place your feet against hers and walk together. Where have you gone? Where shall you go?”

“Not enough! Never enough! Always someplace to stop and say, “No further!” Yet, have you coveted all? This is the Creator next to you. The Creator wedded to your bones and flesh like welded steel? Is it that you do not covet “creating”? Is that it?

Tell me, what is it that you think sex is for? Simple copulation and the tubular emission of seed towards another tubular secretion of eggs? Are you that obedient to the Pope?

Look, *covet! covet! covet! desire! desire! desire! crave! crave! crave!* Maybe that’s it. I should substitute crave for covet. Some sense of being craven—a twist of sarcasm here. But that’s what Sally meant to me; means to me. Even now, here listening to you, I hear myself confessing, confessing that I did not crave...maybe adultery, maybe fornication—sins so specifically defined—but not craving, not true covetousness.

Yet it was there. The seed. *Why can I not touch myself but feel her?* How did what was at first a sexual sin, an escapade into the forbidden: me fornicating, she adulterating...well, I became addicted. But all I could imagine back then was that I was “pussy whipped” or some such cockamamie notion. *Christ!*

What is my offense, my sin? That I did not truly become outlaw. That we did not love, criminally. That, that we did *so little*. At least me, this I know. *So little*.

When we told Fred, why did it come to an end?

Or did it?”

“Father, I’m so afraid!”

“Yes. I understand. But don’t let fear prevent you from feeling.”

“It’s not feeling I’m afraid of , Father. With John I’ve been blessed with the freedom to feel. He has helped me.”

*What could he say?*

“I’m afraid of the not-feeling. That when the cancer takes him, that I won’t be able to feel again, *ever.*”

At the grave site, all had gone, only she lingered. How long would she stay? What would she do when she went home?

The Friar knew that her mother and sisters would come and care for her. That her brothers would pick up the slack. Mow the lawn. Shovel the snow. Take the boys to their basketball and baseball practices. This was not the issue.

*How to minister to someone who now covets death?*